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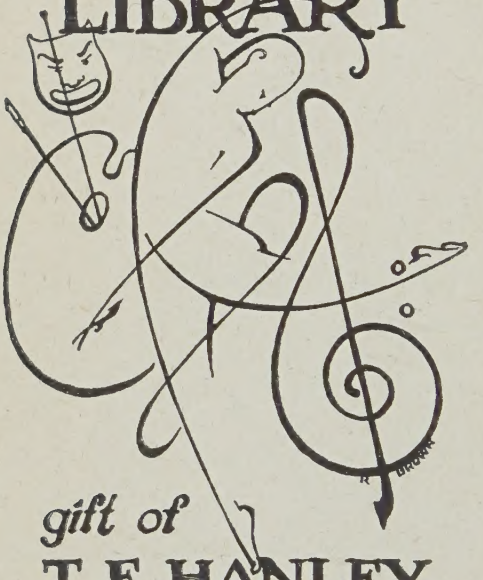

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VOLTAIRE AND FREDERICK THE GREAT

LETTERS

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Selected and Translated with an Introduction by Richard Aldington

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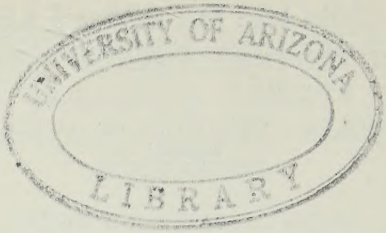

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INTRODUCTION

By SIR EDMUND GOSSE, C.B., LL.D.

FRENCH LITERATURE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Every generation approaches the history of literature with fresh eyes, revising the judgments of the past and recapitulating its own prejudices. In the course of a hundred and fifty years there have been many changes of critical opinion with regard to the product of the Eighteenth Century. In the heyday of romanticism it was attacked with contemptuous fury as though it had been another Bastille. It was not a period of sensibility or imagination, and when nothing else than lyric passion was valued in literature, the masters of so calm an epoch were left out in the cold. We have entered into a new phase, and each decade which divides us from the Revolution offers us opportunities of contemplating the Eighteenth Century in better perspective. We see a period in some respects unique in human history; following an age of force which had hardened into austerity, preceding an age of revolt when all the ideals and traditions were broken, the Eighteenth Century appears like a strip of meadowland between cliffs and the sea. It is, to pursue the image, a field which is flat and at its edges sandy, but on which there flourishes a profusion of flowers. Across this

tract there is a marked division; its upper half is hard and dry, diversified by a few monuments marked with the names of Buffon, Montesquieu, Saint Simon, Voltaire. Through its lower half creeps a river, Rousseau, neither swift nor clear, but spreading prodigal moisture in all directions, and encouraging a tangle of lush growths. This marish of sentimentalities and social contrasts leads us down to the ocean of 1789.

By common consent, Bayle is recognized as the father of the Eighteenth Century, though he hardly entered it. But it was he who started that restless intellectual vitality, often expending itself in mere vivacity, which was its characteristic feature. Bayle was a man who eschewed the dogmatic attitude, to whom everything was a question, who insisted on liberty of the intellectual conscience. Released by the death of Louis XIV from her burden of dogma, France stretched her arms and breathed anew. She changed her fashions, she adopted new formulas, she spoke of "progress," of "liberty," of "tolerance"—unfamiliar things. The earliest exhibition of the new sense in literature was the acceptance of modern aims in writing. The tyranny of the Ancients, which had long been resisted, was finally cast off. Madame Dacier, in her translation of the *Iliad* (1699), took the liberty of changing whatever in Homer she believed would offend French taste. The Abbé Terrasson, charged with erudition, decided after long comparison that Tasso was far superior to Homer as a poet. The first act of the Eighteenth Century was to cut itself off from the discipline of antiquity.

On the space thus left vacant it began to build its graceful and convenient ſtructures. There was no violent breach between the old ſtyle and the new. The poets, such as they were, ſtill were paſtoral, but they gave their shepherdesses the tone of polished society, and taught them to sigh with elegance. Wit took the place of passion, because refinement muſt be cultivated in a purely modern society. To sparkle was the one thing essential. Whatever qualities the authors of a polite age may have, " il faut qu'ils aient de l'esprit, et de l'esprit fin et galant." The Great Age had been sublime, but its majeſty had concealed much roughness and commonness. These could hardly be removed without an effort, to which the Marivaux and La Chaussées were manifeſtly unequal. Elegance, however, muſt at all coſts be attained, and all that could be done was to veil the coarseness of manners with pink gauze. Pathos examined itself in the mirror, and rearranged its coſtume. Even the author of *L'Esprit des Lois* wrote *Le Temple de Gnide*, and declared that " il n'y a que des têtes bien friſées et poudrées qui connaissent tout le mérite " of the new psychology.

Among the changes which followed the accession of Louis XV, none was more remarkable than the complete decay of theological ardour. The psychology of the great preachers whose eloquence had ruled French prose in the seventeenth century wholly evaporated. Gay revellers galloped over the proſtrate ſtatue of Bossuet, and it needed ſtronger arms than those of Massillon to keep them at bay. That graceful

religious moralist was the last of the preachers, the only survivor of a giant race. But he was as innocuous as he was pious, and Voltaire could, without disturbance, enjoy having Massillon's sermons read aloud to him when he dined alone. If theology declined, science took its place. That embracing genius, Buffon, instructed an eager world in a new passion, the love of natural objects. The Eighteenth Century, having thrown off all illusions about human nature, was obliged to endow animals and plants, and presently lakes and mountains, with endearing and imaginary qualities. In this, as in much else, England served as a lighthouse, by which taste was steered in the night. England to the Eighteenth Century was the fortunate island, the one state in which thought was free. Her moral philosophy was seductive, and not Shaftesbury alone, but Mandeville and even Collins had his French disciples. Landscape, through Pope's convention and Thomson's realism, filtered into the intellectual scene, upon which the effect of the English novelists, particularly of Richardson, was immense. *Clarissa* continued to be the most influential of novels until *La Nouvelle Heloïse* diverted sentimentality into a wider channel.

The influence of polite society on literature was paramount in the Eighteenth Century, when it reached an ascendency in France which has been seen nowhere else. Typical of the age is the famous portrait of Mme de Pompadour by La Tour; she sits, dressed in the height of fashion, in a delicate boudoir, with a folio volume of the *Encyclopédie* in front of her, the

goddess of philosophedom. Earlier, the same marvellous La Tour had painted the Duchesse du Maine, as the supreme law-giver of literature, in her academical palace of Sceaux, that temple of the arts. It is in the paſtels of the artiſts that we read the full refinement of the age, when books were written to ſtimulate and to please, while the one unpardonable sin was to be crude. The sportive gallant century romped and fiddled to its close, taking on dolphin-colours after the deaths of Voltaire and Rousseau in 1778. Its higheſt point had been reached in the days of its comparative sobriety, before the delicate ethics of Vauvenargues had succumbed under the pressure of the sentimentaliſts, and before the relaxation of manners had culminated in the boudoir ſtory. But it was all consiſtent. From Fontenelle to Diderot, under many forms, the spirit of the Eighteenth Century remained coherent, doubtless with a more subtle unity that can be met with elsewhere in the hiſtory of the mind. This individuality gives its literary hiſtory in France a peculiar intereſt, and, for those who are not by temperament averse to its neatness and dryness, an essential charm.

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Letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great

INTRODUCTION

When this correspondence was opened in August 1736, by Prince Frederick of Prussia, the writer was twenty-four; Voltaire was forty-two. When at last the death of Voltaire in 1778 brought it to an end, nearly forty-two years had elapsed. The brilliant poet of Frederick's youth had evolved into the Patriarch of Ferney, and Frederick himself had developed from a delicate, rather self-indulgent youth into the hard, lean, stern general and "enlightened" tyrant. No eighteenth-century author attained an influence so complete and extensive as that of Voltaire, the intellectual dictator of his age; and no eighteenth-century monarch, not even Catherine, approached the efficiency and success of Frederick the Great. These two men do not represent the whole of the eighteenth century, but they are the two most splendid examples of its dominant school: the one in the sphere of thought, the other in the sphere of action. The achievements of these two men cannot be adequately reviewed in a brief essay which must be devoted chiefly to their personal relations; they belong to the history of Europe.

In 1736 Voltaire was living at Cirey with Mme du Châtelet. He had twice become acquainted with the inside of the Bastille, had been exiled to England, had

become famous and rich. He was known chiefly as a poet and a dramatiſt. *Œdipe* (1718), *Marianne* (1724), *Brutus* (1730), *Eriphyle* (1732), *Zaïre* (1732), *Alzire* (1736) had won him almoſt inconteſtably the firſt place in his age as a writer of French classic tragedies. By his shorter poems, his *La Baſtille* (1717), *La Henriade* (1723 and 1726), *Le Temple du Goût* (1733), he had secured an immense reputation as a poet. The polite world whispered rumours of a certain deliciously alarming *Pucelle*, fragments of which had been read to a privileged few in the ſtricteſt privacy. The *Hiſtoire de Charles XII* (1731), *Essai sur les Guerres Civiles de France* (1727), *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734), *Traité de Métaphysique* (1734), and one or two brilliant pamphlets showed that this poet was also a prose-writer of extraordinary ability, a man of wide intereſts and unquenchable curiosity, in his way a thinker with the power to ſtimulate thought in others. By many people he was already admired as the moſt important living writer in France, while the religious faction considered him a peculiarly wily and dangerous opponent. This laſt fact, even more than the *liaison* with Mme du Châtelet, explains why Voltaire was then spending so much of his time in the country.

Frederick of Prussia had already passed through curious and bitter experiences. The "rude transports of joy" with which Frederick William had greeted the birth of a male heir soon subsided into the firm determination to mould, or rather thump, his son into the moſt Prussian of Hohenzollerns. The boy was a great disappointment in many ways.

Not only was his health rather weak, but he liked to play with his sister and, as he grew up, developed a strong taste for literature (French literature), for music, for non-religious views of the universe, and other criminal indulgences of the weak and wicked. Side by side with this went a dislike for drill, for giant guardsmen, for beer, pipe-smoking and spitting, for killing animals and ill-treating women, and the like occupations of heroes and nobles. Yet Frederick William had done his best. He had laid down the most precise and detailed rules for his son's education; he had behaved with exemplary brutality, he had forbidden the study of Latin, frowned upon flute music, paraded the Guards indefatigably, knocked down the tutors, and insisted upon the gloomiest and longest religious services obtainable. The result was that Frederick tried to run away. He failed, and the consequences of this error are dreadful to contemplate. Frederick William was convinced that his son was unworthy to wear the crown of Prussia; he wanted to have him executed and, balked of that, tried to make him abdicate. Prince Frederick was imprisoned, his friend and accomplice Katte was executed before his eyes, and the most rigorous treatment was used, to bring the erring Prince back to the paths of royal morality. Before this storm Frederick cowered, promised anything, drilled all day, pretended to like beer, listened meekly to the most tedious sermons. The rigidity of penitential discipline was gradually released, though in 1732 the young man was married to a princess he did not like while he was in love with

someone else. By 1736 this second education was complete and Prince Frederick was released at times to comparative freedom at Rheinsberg. The dreamer had been effectually battered into the man of action, but even Frederick William could not quench his son's love of French literature and his admiration for its greatest living representative. At Rheinsberg Frederick did what many enthusiastic young men do; he wrote a respectful and laudatory letter to the object of his literary devotion.

This formal, rather timid, rather pompous letter, begging for unpublished manuscripts and Voltaire's correspondence, showing the cloven hoof of royalty only in the sentence hinting at " taking you into my service ", received a prompt and brilliant reply. Voltaire whole-heartedly accepted the post of Aristotle to this Alexander and, under the guise of flatteringly praising Frederick, told him what he ought to be. The point most stressed is the necessity for princes to " detest persecution and superstition ". Both parties were charmed by this first interchange of opinions and praise; the correspondence proceeded briskly and at length, though with considerable ceremony and a crescendo of flattery from Voltaire which more than fringes the ridiculous, reaching its zenith of absurdity in a request to Frederick to bring a cordial with him to their first interview since Voltaire is assured that his joy will cause him to swoon. The meeting did not in fact take place until after Frederick became King.

The history of the curious friendship between these

two men is to be read in the following pages, but there are certain gaps which must be briefly filled in here. Frederick's aim was to bring Voltaire to Prussia and to establish him permanently in Berlin as the head of the King's intellectual circle. To attain this end Frederick was not only willing to expend floods of flattery and to exhaust the arts of diplomacy, but he was even ready to open the purse which he usually kept so prudently and closely shut. Voltaire was not wholly averse from this plan, though what he would really have liked was the post of French Ambassador to the Court of Prussia. Failing that—and it was impossible while Cardinal Fleury lived—his idea was to prepare the way by running as a political agent between Versailles and Potsdam. Frederick, however, was determined that Voltaire should be his literary *cher maître*, his friend and pensioner, if Voltaire chose, but nothing more; and he treated Voltaire's political overtures and antics with boisterous contempt. Moreover, another and most formidable obstacle existed in the shape of Mme du Châtelet who, having caught and tamed the first man of letters of the age, was not inclined to yield him up to anyone, even to a king. Probably an effective political *rôle* would have detached Voltaire from his mistress, but, though Frederick amused himself by pretending to give some political confidences (immediately retailed, as he well knew, to Fleury), the bait was not sufficient to capture the wily prey. Moreover, Frederick made a mistake by betraying some of Voltaire's confidences to Versailles with the hope that

Voltaire would in consequence be exiled once more from France and therefore be compelled to take refuge in Prussia. This danger, if it ever existed, was promptly thwarted by Mme du Châtelet and the confidence between the two men was not increased by the discovery of their mutual treachery.[1]

Voltaire's journey to Prussia in 1743 might have resulted in his permanent establishment there, but for his political ambitions and the existence of Mme du Châtelet. Frederick flattered him, but did not trust him. The flattery was delicious, but the lack of trust was disconcerting. As a diplomat, Voltaire was no match for his astute literary pupil, and, though he did his best to betray Frederick, the political results were very meagre. From Frederick's point of view, the result was a stale-mate, and he saw that it would be difficult to secure Voltaire permanently for literary evenings so long as Mme du Châtelet could procure him access to the French Court and could exert her feminine influence over him. The reader will observe that the tone of Frederick's letters changes completely after 1743. He still flatters, still expresses admiration for Voltaire's genius, but it is plain that he despises Voltaire's character and has nothing but contempt for his political ambitions. He is never weary of joking at Voltaire's much-prized title of Gentleman in

[1] See *Œuvres de Voltaire* (Hachette), vol. XXXI, Letters 1232, 1233, 1236, 1238, 1243, 1247, 1249, 1251, 1253 (especially), 1260. Most of these are addressed to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs and contain close relations of Voltaire's political conversations with Frederick.

Ordinary to the King of France, and he is positively brutal on the subject of Voltaire's valetudinarian complaints. Voltaire meanwhile had discovered that a royal pupil in literature and "philosophy" can be a royal master and even a royal tyrant in other respects; he had discovered this, but did not take the lesson to heart. Nevertheless, the correspondence continued, and Frederick obstinately held to his purpose.

Several years passed and Frederick seemed further from "possessing" Voltaire than ever; but in October 1748, Voltaire discovered that the Marquise du Châtelet was deceiving him with the Marquis de St. Lambert. This put a new aspect on matters, and the possibilities of another and perhaps longer stay in Prussia were discussed in the correspondence. A visit was arranged for the summer of 1749, but Mme du Châtelet became *enceinte*, which was extremely dangerous at her age, and Voltaire generously decided to remain and to nurse his faithless mistress. Frederick taunted him with being a man midwife, but Voltaire was not to be jibed into abandoning what he considered a duty; one of his really good traits is excellently displayed in the letter (No. XCV) where he refuses to leave Mme du Châtelet until she is out of danger. It was well for his subsequent peace of mind that he did remain, for Mme du Châtelet died a few days after the birth of her child.[1] Voltaire retired to Paris to hide his grief.

[1] It is unlucky for us that Voltaire was so distressed by the event that he failed to secure the four volumes of his letters to her. They were burned by the Marquis du Châtelet.

The death of the Marquise, however, removed the chief obstacle to Voltaire's compliance with Frederick's wishes. All Voltaire's friends and relatives in France, both the interested and the disinterested, attempted to dissuade him from this, one of the most foolish of his actions. On-lookers could perceive very well that two such combustibles as Frederick and Voltaire would soon explode when brought together; they could also see (and Voltaire was naïvely blind to this) that Louis XV, already no friend to the "philosopher," would be mortally offended. The tragi-comic result of the establishment in Berlin is known to everyone. The quarrels and patchings-up ended finally by Voltaire's leaving in disgrace and by his undergoing the indignities of imprisonment, insult, search, and the like humiliations at Frankfort. In 1753, at the age of sixty, Voltaire found himself living in Alsatian inns, almost as a fugitive, afraid to return to Berlin, refused permission to enter France. And thus, after much hesitation and several temporary expedients, began the last and most famous epoch of Voltaire's life, that of the Sage of Ferney.

Frederick meanwhile had developed astoundingly from the literary prince who had sought the friendship of M. de Voltaire in 1736. The First and Second Silesian Wars had added immensely to his dominions and had brought out Frederick's capacity as a soldier. He had fled the battlefield of Mollwitz somewhat hurriedly, but he did not abandon, he led his armies at Hohenfriedberg, at Soor, at Hennersdorf; and peace was signed, not in Berlin, but in Dresden. The

administration of his inheritance and of the lands stolen from Austria called out all Frederick's admirable gifts as an organizer. When all Prussia trembled at his frown, when every chancellory in Europe felt unfeigned respect for the power of Prussian arms, when every day Frederick became more imperious, it was hardly likely that he would patiently endure the monkey antics of a French pensioner or, as we should put it, the eccentricities of a man of genius. To live on familiar terms with Frederick the Great was not easy. He liked men friends, he liked to think that in his hours of recreation he could treat his poets and philosophers as equals. But it was not really so. He could never forget the king for long, and what made it so difficult to behave in perfect accordance with his moods was the fact that no one could tell when the philosophic friend would suddenly become the monarch. "Beware, gentlemen", said Voltaire once at a supper-party, as he observed Frederick stiffen, "The King of Prussia has just come in!" Dining with despots must ever be an uncomfortable form of entertainment.

Those who are more tenacious of the forms of democratic government than they are capable of cool judgment, affect to disparage the brains, character, and work of Frederick because, and only because, he was a despot. This is both short-sighted and presumptuous. A man who has never handled even a platoon in action can have little idea of the demands made upon a commander, and not every private citizen who is fluent with advice and blame could

administer a State. The following lines from a cool, but extremely competent and well-informed writer, Mr. Reddaway,[1] will give some idea of the greatness of Frederick:

"The versatility with which he entered into every department of government in turn is no more astounding than the clearness with which he perceived the immediate obstacles to be overcome in each, the courage with which he faced them, and the force, swift, steady and irresistible, by which he triumphed. The wonderful energy which prompted him to bear on his own shoulders all the burden of the state in war and peace, and to put forth all his strength at every blow was yet more marvellous because it was susceptible of control. Frederick . . . ceased from the labours of the Seven Years' War, only to undertake the reconstruction of the economic life of a great kingdom. By mere overflow of force he finished his *History of the War* early in the year after that in which peace was made. Yet with all his energy he was able to realize that not seldom force needs the help of time. He was gratified when some of his enterprises began to repay him after twenty years, and he declined to aggrandise Prussia beyond the limit which his statesman-like instinct taught him that her strength would warrant.

". . . If we turn from his powers to his performance, we find his name associated with three great phenomena of history. Under his guidance Prussia rose at one step from the third to the highest grade among the Powers. He was, moreover, the pattern of the monarchs of his time, the type of the benevolent despots of the late eighteenth century. Finally, in the great series of events by which Germany has become a united military Empire, his life-work fills a conspicuous place.

[1] *Frederick the Great and the Rise of Prussia*, by W. F. Reddaway, M.A. (1904): an excellent handbook to the life and work of Frederick.

"Frederick's influence upon his contemporaries was enormous, and in many respects it cannot be over-praised. He found what has been styled 'Sultan and harem economy' prevalent among his peers, together with a tendency to regard the income of the state as the pocket-money of the ruler. For this he substituted in Europe a great measure of his own ideal of royal duty. Fearing nothing and hoping little from any future state, he was yet too proud to flinch from an atom of the lifelong penance that he believed was prescribed for kings by some law of nature. Duty to his house and duty to his State were to him the same, and they dictated a life of incessant labour for his subjects' good, and forbade the appropriation of more than a living wage. . . . Thanks in great part to Frederick, irresponsible monarchy became impossible for ever."

Such was the mature statesman whom Voltaire tried to outwit in diplomacy, then coquetted with from France, then joined in the capacity of *littérateur en chef* and "philosophic friend", and then quarrelled with in a fashion disastrous to himself. The details of the quarrel may be sought in Desnoiresterres, who tells us, in the way most favourable to Voltaire, the story of the Jew, the Saxony notes, the diamonds, and the law-suit, of Maupertuis, Koenig, and *Dr. Akakia*, of the arrest of Voltaire at Frankfort by command of His Prussian Majesty. Here is not the place to attempt a recital of these woeful occurrences. It is enough to say that, though Frederick was a great king, he was a terrible friend even to the man whose genius he admired above that of all living persons. We may grant that Voltaire deeply offended his patron, who so often protested that he was a friend and not a monarch, but we cannot deny that Frederick in his resentment was

cruel. It was a pity that Frederick dropped his philosophical weapons and mobilized his bayonets against Voltaire at Frankfort; and it was indeed a mistake on his part to think that Voltaire would ever forgive him. In later years, Frederick no doubt thought that all was forgotten and forgiven; but, years afterwards, when Voltaire was dead and he himself on the verge of the grave, he read those atrocious *Memoirs of M. de Voltaire* which are among the cruellest satires ever written. These *Memoirs* were composed in 1759, when Voltaire's resentment was still violent. He never published them, but he did not destroy them; and the fact of their existence poisons the sincerity and dignity of even his last farewell letter to Frederick.

After the disaster of Frankfort the correspondence between the two was the reverse of cordial, and often languished. During the Seven Years' War, when Prussia and Frederick were fighting for their lives, the correspondence sprang up once more. Voltaire wrote to dissuade Frederick from suicide and for some time was the agent of obscure negotiations for peace between the French government and Prussia. But peace did not come through the mediation of Voltaire, always so unlucky in practical politics; and no letters were written between 1761 and 1765. By that time Voltaire could afford to stand upon his dignity as the unquestioned dictator of letters, as a man whose great age put him above ordinary rules, as the Patriarch whose works had created a whole new generation eager to carry out his schemes of reform. Frederick

held out the olive-branch and Voltaire at first refused to grasp it; not until Frederick had apologized (Letter CLI), as handsomely as a proud king could, did Voltaire consent to renew the correspondence. Twelve years were to elapse before death ended this exchange of letters which were never so frequent, so entertaining, or so varied as in the last decade of Voltaire's life.

Voltaire was right to show a decent reluctance in re-admitting Frederick to something like the old terms of friendly intimacy. Both had been wrong in the old quarrels, but the violence of Frankfort, so outrageous and so unnecessary, had never been atoned for or even regretted. Frederick's obstinacy on this point shows that he knew he was in the wrong. But, if he could stand upon the privilege of his Prussian kingship, Voltaire could now treat with him as power to power, from the elevation of a more tenuous but more universal monarchy over the minds of men. Since Petrarch no European man of letters, not even Erasmus, has wielded in his lifetime so great and so extensive an influence as Voltaire.

This man was a Proteus intellectually and morally. His versatility evades definition. His actions were dependent not so much upon principles or strong passions as upon the caprices of infinitely varying moods; in his conduct he was the *prima donna* of literature. His most intimate friends could never be certain what he would do or say in a given situation. He arranged himself and facts to suit the purpose of the moment and must sometimes have wondered at

his own contradictions. Lying, he told everybody, was a necessary shield in life; and then was amusingly surprised when his word was doubted. The truest thing said of him is that he was never idle and seldom dull; he had an energy as tireless and self-consuming as that of Frederick. His intellect was universally curious, with a superficial but impressive lucidity and method. He was seldom profound, but never vague. If he contradicted himself there was clarity even in the confusion. His candour was intellectual, not moral; yet his intellect was sometimes the dupe or the obsequious servant of his prejudices. *Le Mondain*, written to annoy the orthodox religious, is contradicted by *Candide*, which was designed to plague the philosophic Optimists and Jean Jacques.

Examples of such contradictions might be almost indefinitely multiplied, and yet in the end it is true that Voltaire's personality is an entity and his work a whole. He was not a feather tossed in the contrary winds of life, but a sea with tides and currents. In the mass, he knew what he wanted and obtained it, knew what he thought and said it plainly and convincingly. He is more traditional than he knew or than his admirers realize; Voltaire has spiritual ancestors among the satirists of medieval France. He is a classical Rutebeuf; or, to change the metaphor, a Palladian façade to that temple of the *esprit Gaulois* where eight centuries of French burgesses have satirically damned the king, the nobles, and the clergy.

Mere speculative inquiry and paper-triumphs could not satisfy this eminently practical man; he was earnest

to put his multitudinous ideas into practice. Hence the colony of Ferney, hence the perpetual hankering for political power, hence the infinite temporizing with the great. The administration of Ferney was a demonstration of how M. de Voltaire would have ruled a kingdom, and not all his vast fame and intellectual power could console him for the disappointment of never having sat in a council of Ministers of State. It is fortunate for us that Voltaire's France had no constitutional government, no Parliament where he could have expended his stock of ideas in fruitlessly eloquent speeches and his infinite talent for intrigue in equally fruitless political combinations. It is not difficult to imagine Voltaire in the lobbies. He would have enjoyed the endless wire-pulling as much as the realities of power; and, had power been granted him, he would have governed with a benevolent perfidy.

The intellectual catholicity which in Europe superseded the Roman Catholic Church, as that in its turn had superseded the Roman Empire, is strikingly if imperfectly embodied in Voltaire. He is in part a man of the Renaissance, in part a man of modern times; struggling away from cramping superstitions whether of antiquity or of the Middle Ages, national or religious, legal or social; striving, perhaps blunderingly, towards that free, disinterested labour of the mind which is the great achievement of European civilization. He was not a great philosopher or a scientist; he was only in a limited sense a great artist; but he taught his followers that art perishes in vain formality and aimlessness when it is not nourished by

science, and that science becomes barbarous and pedantic without the graces and the charm of the arts. We cannot claim that Voltaire invented the French critical spirit, but the Humanist ideal owes a debt to him. With all his limitations and imperfections Voltaire served the cause of true civilization. He always denied the claims of ignorance, violence, and prejudice.

Voltaire called himself a friend of humanity, and he was not insincere. When he was himself firmly and comfortably established, he was not unwilling to lend his pen to the cause of " the human race ". He cannot be looked upon as a hero, but he cannot be denied the merits of his Humanism. The solution of human destiny by the unfettered labours of the best minds—that principle binds together his multitudinous writings. Perhaps he believed too easily that a well-fed, well-housed, well-dressed, peaceful, fornicating, sceptical humanity would, by the exercise of those qualities, enter upon a golden era. But he was right in holding that a starving, gloomy, cowed, wretched race of men will never further the development of human happiness and grandeur. And it is to no one's advantage that there should exist even one ragged, starving, despairing human being; for, while even one such remains, injustice and inhumanity will not have vanished from the earth. To perceive that in the eighteenth century needed compassion and the love of justice as well as a swift intelligence and a religion of Reason.

NOTE

In selecting these letters I have tried to include as much as possible. The principles of omission adopted were these:

1. All letters and almost all passages occupied solely with the correction of Frederick's French style have been left out.

2. Most of the versified correspondence and verse passages have been omitted except where their retention seemed absolutely necessary.

3. Letters and passages of letters repeating topics and ideas already discussed have usually, though not always, been omitted.

4. Finally, all letters and passages of letters which to the translator's taste appeared less striking or interesting have also been omitted.

The total number of letters preserved in this correspondence is 654, of which 223 are given here wholly or in part.

LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED

Voltaire: *Oeuvres Complètes.* Hachette reprint of Beuchot's edition, 40 vols. 1866.

Voltaire: *Lettres Inédites*, 2 vols. 1856.

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Frederick the Great: *Oeuvres.* Berlin, 1846–57.

G. Desnoiresterres: *Voltaire et la Société Française.* Paris, 1867–76. (See particularly: Voltaire et Frédéric, 1870.)

W. F. Reddaway: *Frederick the Great and the Rise of Prussia.* 1904.

Ernest Lavisse: *La Jeunesse du Grand Frédéric.* Paris, 1891.

LETTERS OF VOLTAIRE AND FREDERICK THE GREAT

I

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Berlin, 8th August, 1736

Sir,

Although I have not the satisfaction of knowing you personally, you are none the less known to me by your works. They are treasures of the mind, if the expression may be allowed, and compositions elaborated with so much taste, delicacy, and art, that their beauties appear new each time they are reread. I feel I have discovered in them the character of their ingenious author, who does honour to our age and to the human mind. The great men of modern times will one day be obliged to you, and to you alone, if the dispute concerning the ancients and the moderns should again arise; because you will incline the balance to their side.

To the quality of an excellent poet you add an infinity of other knowledge which indeed has some affinity with poetry but has only been fitted to it by your pen. Never before has a poet made

metaphysical thought rhythmic; you were the first for whom that honour was reserved. That taste for philosophy which you display in your writings encourages me to send you a translation I have had made of the accusation and justification of M. Wolff, the most celebrated philosopher of our days, who has been cruelly accused of irreligion and atheism because he carried light into the most shadowy recesses of metaphysics and because he treated this difficult subject in a manner as elevated as it was clear and precise. Such is the destiny of great men: Their superior genius ever leaves them naked to the poisoned darts of calumny and envy.

I am now having translated a *Treatise on God, the Soul and the World*, which emanates from the pen of the same author. It shall be sent you, Sir, as soon as it is finished, and I am sure you will be struck by the force of evidence in all its propositions, which follow each other geometrically and are connected together like the links of a chain.

The complacency and support you exhibit towards all who devote themselves to the arts and sciences make me hope that you will not exclude me from the number of those whom you find worthy of your instruction. I mean your correspondence; which cannot but be profitable to every thinking being. Without aspersing the deserts of others, I dare to assert that the whole world cannot show a person to whom you could not act as a master. Without overwhelming you with an incense unworthy to be offered you, I may yet say that I find numberless beauties in

your works. Your *Henriade* charms me and triumphs happily over the injudicious criticisms which have been made of it. The tragedy of *César* shows us sustained characters; its sentiments are all magnificent and grand; and we realise that Brutus is either a Roman or an Englishman. *Alzire* adds to the graces of novelty the happy contrast between the manners of savages and of Europeans. Through the character Gusman you show us that Christianity when misconceived and guided by false zeal renders men more barbarous and cruel than Paganism itself. If Corneille, the great Corneille, who attracted the admiration of his age, should come to life again in our days, he would see with astonishment and perhaps with envy that the goddess of Tragedy lavishes prodigally upon you those favours of which she was so sparing to him. What may we not expect from the author of so many masterpieces! What fresh wonders may not issue from the pen which lately designed so wittily and elegantly the Temple of Taste!

This it is which makes me desire so ardently to possess all your works. I beg you to send them to me, sir, and to communicate them unreservedly. If among your manuscripts there should be any which, with necessary prudence, you think fit to hide from the public eye, I promise you to keep it secret and to content myself with applauding it in private. I know unfortunately that the faith of princes is little to be trusted in our days; yet I hope you will not allow yourself to be moved by general prejudices and that you will make an exception to the rule in my favour.

In possessing your works I should think myself richer than in possessing all the transitory and contemptible gifts of fortune which are acquired and lost by a like chance. The first can be made our own—I mean your works—by the aid of memory, and remain ours as long as it does. Knowing the slight extent of my own memory I reflect long before choosing those things I consider worthy of being placed in it.

If poetry were in the same condition as it was formerly, that is if poets could do nothing but hum over tedious idylls, eclogues cast in one mould and insipid stanzas, or if they could do nothing but raise their lyres to the tone of elegy, I should renounce it for ever; but you ennoble this art, you show us new paths and roads unknown to the Lefrancs and the Rousseaus.[1]

Your poems possess qualities which render them respectable and worthy of the admiration and study of good men. They are a course of morality whereby we learn to think and to act. Virtue is painted there in its fairest colours. The idea of true glory is there defined; and you insinuate the taste for knowledge in a manner so fine and so delicate that he who has read your works breathes the ambition of following in your steps. How often have I said to myself: "Wretched man! abandon this burden whose weight exceeds your strength; Voltaire cannot be imitated except by Voltaire himself."

At such moments I have realised that the advantages of birth and that vapour of grandeur with which vanity soothes us is of little service or, to speak truly, of none.

[1] J. B. Rousseau, the lyric poet; not Jean Jacques.

These distinctions are foreign to ourselves and but embellish outwardly. How much more preferable are the talents of the mind! How much is due to men whom nature has distinguished by the mere fact that she has created them! She takes pleasure in creating some whom she endows with every capacity needed for the progress of the arts and sciences; 'tis for princes to reward their vigils. Ah! may glory only make use of me to crown your successes! I should fear nothing except that this country is so infertile in laurels that it does not furnish as many as your works deserve.

If I am not so favoured by my destiny as to take you into my service, at least I may hope one day to see you, whom I have admired so long and from so far, and to assure you by word of mouth that I am, with all the esteem and consideration due to those who, following the torch of truth, devote their labours to the public, Sir, your affectionate friend,

FÉDÉRIC, P.R. OF PRUSSIA.

II

From Voltaire

Paris, 26th August, 1736

Monseigneur,

I should indeed be insensitive were I not infinitely touched by the letter with which your Royal Highness has been graciously pleased to honour

me. My self-love was but too flattered; but that love of the human race which has always existed in my heart and which I dare to say determines my character, gave me a pleasure a thousand times purer when I saw that the world holds a prince who thinks like a man, a philosophical prince who will make men happy.

Suffer me to tell you that there is no man on the earth who should not return thanks for the care you take in cultivating by sane philosophy a soul born to command. Be certain there have been no truly good kings except those who began like you, by educating themselves, by learning to know men, by loving the truth, by detesting persecution and superstition. Any prince who thinks in this way can bring back the golden age to his dominions. Why do so few kings seek out this advantage? You perceive the reason, Monseigneur; it is because almost all of them think more of royalty than of humanity: you do precisely the opposite. If the tumult of affairs and the malignancy of men do not in time alter so divine a character, you will be adored by your people and admired by the whole world. Philosophers worthy of that name will fly to your dominions; and, as celebrated artists crowd to that country where their art is most favoured, men who think will press forward to surround your throne.

The illustrious Queen Christina left her kingdom to seek the arts; reign, Monseigneur, and let the arts come to seek you.

May you never be disgusted from the sciences by

the quarrels of learned men! From those circumſtances which you were graciously pleased to inform me of, Monseigneur, you see that moſt of them are men like courtiers themselves. They are sometimes as greedy, as intriguing, as treacherous, as cruel; and the only difference between the peſts of the court and the peſts of the school is that the latter are the more ridiculous.

It is very sad for humanity that those who term themselves the messengers of Heaven's command, the interpreters of the Divinity, in a word theologians, are sometimes the moſt dangerous of all; that some of them are as pernicious to society as they are obscure in their ideas and that their souls are inflated with bitterness and pride in proportion as they are empty of truths. For the sake of a sophism they would trouble the earth and would persuade all kings to avenge with fire and ſteel the honour of an argument *in ferio* or *in barbara*.

Every thinking being not of their opinion is an atheiſt; and every king who does not favour them will be damned. You know, Monseigneur, that the beſt one can do is to leave to themselves these pretended teachers and real enemies of the human race. Their words, when unheeded, are loſt in the air like wind; but if the weight of authority is lent them, this wind acquires a force which sometimes overthrows the throne itself.

I see, Monseigneur, with the joy of a heart filled with love of the public weal, the immense diſtance you set between men who seek the truth in peace and those

who would make war for words they do not understand. I see that Newton, Leibnitz, Bayle, Locke, those elevated minds, so enlightened, so gentle, have nourished your spirit and that you reject other pretended nourishment which you find poisoned or without substance.

I cannot sufficiently thank your Royal Highness for your kindness in sending me the little book about M. Wolff. I look upon his metaphysical ideas as things which do honour to the human mind. They are flashes in the midst of a dark night; and that, I think, is all we can hope of metaphysics. It seems improbable that the first principles of things will ever be thoroughly known. The mice living in a few little holes of an immense building do not know if the building is eternal, who is the architect, or why the architect built it. They try to preserve their lives, to people their holes, and to escape the destructive animals which pursue them. We are the mice; and the divine architect who built this universe has not yet, so far as I know, told His secret to any of us. If any man can pretend to have guessed accurately, it is M. Wolff. He may be combatted, but he must be esteemed; his philosophy is far from being pernicious; is there anything more beautiful and more true than to say, as he does, that men should be just even if they were so unfortunate as to be atheists ?

The protection you appear to give, Monseigneur, to this learned man, is a proof of the accuracy of your mind and of the humanity of your sentiments.

You have the kindness, Monseigneur, to promise

that you will send me the *Treatise on God, the Soul and the World.* What a present, Monseigneur, and what an interchange! The heir of a monarchy deigns to send instruction from the heart of his palace to a solitary! Be graciously pleased to send me this present, Monseigneur; my extreme love of truth is the one thing which makes me worthy of it. Most princes fear to listen to the truth, but you will teach it.

As to the verses you speak of—you think as wisely of this art as in everything else. Verses which do not teach men new and moving truths do not deserve to be read. You perceive that there is nothing more contemptible than for a man to spend his life in rhyming worn-out commonplaces which do not deserve the name of thoughts. If there is anything viler it is to be nothing but a satirical poet and to write only to decry others. Such poets are to Parnassus what those doctors, who know nothing but words and intrigue against those who write things, are to the schools.

If *La Henriade* did not displease your Royal Highness I must thank that love of truth, that horror which my poem inspires for the factious, for persecutors, for the superstitious, for tyrants and for rebels. 'Tis the work of an honest man; and should find grace in the eyes of a philosophic prince.

You command me to send you my other work; I shall obey you, Monseigneur; you shall be my judge, you shall stand to me in lieu of the public. I will submit to you what I have attempted in philosophy;

your instruction shall be my reward: 'tis a prize which few sovereigns can give. I am certain of your secrecy; your virtue must be equal to your knowledge.

I should consider it a most valuable privilege to wait upon your Royal Highness. We go to Rome to see churches, pictures, ruins and bas-reliefs. A prince like yourself is far more deserving of a journey; 'tis a more marvellous rarity. But friendship, which holds me in my retreat, does not permit me to leave it. Doubtless you think like Julian, that calumniated great man, who said that friends should always be preferred to kings.

In whatever corner of the world I end my life, be certain, Monseigneur, that I shall constantly wish you well, and in doing so wish the happiness of a nation. My heart will be among your subjects; your fame will ever be dear to me. I shall wish that you may always be like yourself and that other kings may be like you. I am with deep respect, your Royal Highness's most humble, etc.

VOLTAIRE.

III

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 4th November, 1736

Sir,

'Tis a very difficult test for a student in philosophy to receive praise from a man of your deserts. Self-love and presumption, those cruel tyrants of the soul which poison it with flattery,

believe themselves authorised by a philosopher and, receiving arms from your hands, would usurp upon my reason a dominion I have always disputed.

In your letter, Sir, you draw the portrait of an accomplished prince, wherein I do not recognise myself. 'Tis a lesson dressed up in the most ingenious and most obliging manner; in short, 'tis an artifice to bring timid truth to a prince's ears. I shall take this portrait as my model and shall do my best to render myself the worthy disciple of a master who teaches so divinely.

Already I feel infinitely obliged to your works; 'tis a source whence may be drawn the sentiments and knowledge worthy of the greatest men. My vanity does not go so far as to assume that title; but if I should attain to it, Sir, I shall owe it to you.

I cannot prevent myself from admiring that generous character, that love of the human race which should bring you the approbation of all nations: I even dare to say that they owe you as much and more than the Greeks owed Solon and Lycurgus, those wise legislators whose laws caused their country to flourish, the foundation of a grandeur to which Greece would never have aspired nor have dared to pretend without them. Authors are the legislators of the human race, their writings are dispersed into all parts of the world; and being known to the whole universe manifest the ideas by which others are marked. Thus your works make public your sentiments. The charm of your eloquence is their least beauty; all that finished effect produced when strength of thought is united with fire

and expression can be found in them. These true beauties charm and touch your readers; and thus a whole world soon breathes that love of the human race which your happy impulse has created. You form good citizens, faithful friends, and subjects who, abhorring both rebellion and tyranny, are only zealous for the public good. In short 'tis to you we owe all the virtues which create the security and charm of life. How much is owing to you!

If all Europe does not recognise this truth, it is none the less true. In short, if all human nature is not so grateful to you as you deserve, at least be certain of my gratitude. Henceforth consider my actions as the fruit of your lessons. I received them, they touched my heart, and I have made it a law to myself to follow them all my life.

If I desire anything with ardour, it is to have learned and able men about me. I do not think those efforts are wasted which are employed to attract them; 'tis homage due to their merit and an admission of one's need to be enlightened by their abilities.

I cannot recover from my astonishment when I think that a nation cultivated by the fine arts, seconded by the genius and emulation of another neighbouring people—when I think, I say, that this polished and enlightened nation does not know the treasure enclosed in its heart. What! That very Voltaire to whom our hands erect altars and statues is neglected in his own country and lives solitary in the deserts of Champagne! 'Tis a paradox, an enigma, a bizarre result of men's caprice.

Great men are exposed to persecution. Trees whose heads are lifted to the clouds are more obnoxious to the impetuosity of winds than the shrubs which grow at their feet.

As touching theologians, it seems to me they are all alike, of whatever religion or nation they may be; their object is always to claim despotic authority over men's consciences; this suffices to make them persecute all of us whose noble temerity dares to unveil the truth; their hands are always armed with the thunderbolt of anathema to crush this imaginary phantom of irreligion which, as they assert, they combat ceaselessly, but under the name of which in effect they combat the enemies of their fury and ambition. Yet, according to them, they preach humility, a virtue they have never practised, and call themselves the ministers of a God of peace whom they serve with a heart filled with hatred and ambition. Their conduct, so incompatible with the morality they preach, in my opinion is itself sufficient to discredit their doctrine.

The character of truth is very different. It needs neither arms to defend itself nor violence to compel men to believe it; it has only to appear and, as soon as its light has dispersed the clouds which hid it, its triumph is assured.

Monarchs can give treasures, kingdoms even, and all that can flatter the pride, avarice and cupidity of men; but all these things remain outside them, and far from rendering them more enlightened than they are, generally serve only to corrupt them. The present you promised me, Sir, is far otherwise useful.

In reading it we find the means of correcting morals and enlightening the mind. Far from having the wild presumption to set myself up as a judge of your works, I am content to admire them; the object of my reading is to instruct myself.

Your fame, already so well established, cannot be increased by my weak voice; but at least the world will be forced to admit that the descendants of the ancient Goths and Vandals, the inhabitants of the forests of Germany, can do justice to shining merit, to the virtue and talents of great men whatever their nationality may be.

I know, Sir, that I should expose you to distress were I so indiscreet as to communicate the manuscript works you may confide to me. I beg you to rely upon my promises; my faith is inviolable.

I have too much respect for the bonds of friendship to wish to tear you from Émilie's[1] arms. It would need a hard and insensible heart to exact such a sacrifice of you; only those who have never known the sweetness of being near those we love could fail to understand the pain that such a separation would cause you. All I exact of you is to render my homage to that prodigy of wit and learning. How rare such women are!

There is no happiness I do not wish you and none of which you are not worthy. Henceforth Cirey shall be my Delphi and your letters, which I beg you to continue, my oracles. I am, Sir, with great esteem, your most affectionate friend.

[1] Mme la Marquise du Châtelet.

IV

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Remusberg,[1] *3rd December, 1736*

Sir,

I was agreeably surprised to-day to receive your letter and the pieces which accompanied it. Nothing in the world could have given me more pleasure, for I am more eager for your work than for any other. I only wish that the sovereignty you give me as a thinking being placed me in a position where I could give you real marks of the esteem I have for you, which cannot be refused you. I have read the dissertation on the soul which you addressed to Father Tournemine. Every reasonable man who is able only to believe what he can understand, who does not decide rashly on matters our weak reason cannot fathom, will always be of your opinion. It is certain that we shall never attain to knowledge of first causes. We do not understand why two stones struck together give out fire; how then can we assert that God could not unite thought with matter? What is certain is that I am matter and that I think. This argument proves to me the truth of your proposition.

I shall not tell you, Sir, all I think of the pieces you have just sent me. The ode filled with beauties contains only very evident truths; the epistle to Émilie is a marvellous abridgement of Mr. Newton's system; the *Mondain* is an amiable piece breathing nothing but joy and, if I may so express it, is a true course in

[1] Rheinsberg.

morality. The enjoyment of a pure pleasure is for us the most real thing in this world. I mean the pleasure of which Montaigne speaks, such as does not plunge into the excesses of outrageous debauchery. I expect the *Philosophie de Newton* with great impatience; I shall be infinitely obliged to you for it. I see I shall never have any other teacher than M. de Voltaire. You instruct me in verse, you instruct me in prose; I should needs have a crabbed heart if I were indocile to your lessons.

I am still awaiting *La Pucelle*. I hope she will be no more austere than so many other heroines who have yet allowed themselves to be conquered by the prayers and perseverance of their lovers.

You are too far above praise for me to give it to you, but at the same time too much a friend to truth to be offended by hearing it. Allow me then, Sir, to repeat all the esteem I have for you. My praise is limited to saying that I know you. May all the world know you in the same way! May my eyes one day see him whose mind is the charm of my life!

I am with real consideration, Sir, your most affectionate friend.

V

From Voltaire

Monseigneur, *Leiden, January, 1737*

I shed tears of joy on reading the letter of the 9th September with which your Royal Highness honoured me; in it I recognised a prince who will be

certainly beloved by the human race. In every way I am astonished: you think like Trajan, you write like Pliny, and you use French like our best writers. What difference there is between men! Louis XIV was a great king, I respect his memory; but he did not speak so humanely as you, Monseigneur, and did not express himself in the same way. I have seen his letters; he could not spell his own language. Under your auspices Berlin will be the Athens of Germany and perhaps of Europe. I am now in a town where two private persons, M. Boerhaave on one side, and M. s'Gravesande on the other attract four or five hundred foreigners. A prince like yourself will attract many more; and I confess I shall think myself very unfortunate if I die before I have seen the model of princes and the marvel of Germany.

I would not flatter you, Monseigneur, it would be a crime. It would be throwing a poisoned breath upon a flower; I am incapable of it; it is my very heart which speaks to your Royal Highness.

On arriving at Amsterdam I found they had begun an edition of my poor works. I shall have the honour to send you the first copy. Meanwhile, I shall be so bold as to send your Royal Highness a manuscript[1] which I should only dare to show to one so free from prejudices, so philosophic, so indulgent as you are, and to a prince who among so many homages deserves that of a boundless confidence. Some time will be needed to revise and to copy it and I shall send it by whatever way you desire.

[1] The *Traité de Métaphysique.*

Indispensable occupations and circumstances beyond my control forbid me to carry myself to your feet that homage I owe you. A time will come perhaps when I shall be more fortunate.

It seems that your Royal Highness likes every sort of literature. A great prince takes care of all ranks in his dominions; a great genius enjoys every sort of study. In my little sphere I have only saluted from afar the frontiers of each science; my time has been shared among a little metaphysics, a little history, some small amount of physics, and a few verses; though weak in all these matters, I offer you at least what I have.

Were I not so interested in the happiness of mankind I should be sorry that you are destined to be a king. I could wish you a private man; I could wish that my soul might freely approach yours; but my wish must yield to the public good. Permit me, Monseigneur, to respect you more as a man than as a prince; permit that, among all your grandeurs, your soul should receive my first homage; and permit me to tell you once more what admiration and hope you give me.

I am, etc.

VI

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

January, 1737

Sir,

I confess I felt a secret joy at knowing you are in Holland, seeing that I shall more easily receive

news of you, though I fear from the manner in which you inform me you are there that some distressing reason has obliged you to leave France incognito. Be certain, sir, that the secret shall not become known through my indiscretion.

France and England are the only two states where the arts are held in consideration. Other nations must go to them for instruction. Those who cannot visit them in person can at least extract knowledge and enlightenment from the writings of their celebrated authors. Consequently their languages deserve that foreigners should study them, especially French, which in my opinion has a particular grace from its elegance, its subtlety, its energy and turns of expression. These motives caused me to apply myself to the study of French. I feel richly rewarded for my trouble by the approbation you so indulgently grant me.

Louis XIV was a great prince in a vast number of ways; a solecism, a mistake in spelling cannot in the least tarnish the glitter of a reputation established by so many actions which have rendered him immortal. In every sense it was fitting for him to say: *Caesar est supra grammaticam*. But there are particular cases which are not generally applicable. This is among them; and what was an imperceptible defect in Louis XIV would become an unpardonable negligence in any other.

I am great in no respect. My application alone may perhaps render me one day useful to my country; that is all the fame of which I am ambitious. The arts

and sciences have ever been the children of abundance. Those countries in which they have flourished have held an incontestable advantage over those whom barbarity nourished in obscurity. Besides the fact that the sciences greatly contribute to men's happiness, I should think myself very happy to be able to transplant them to our distant climate where hitherto they have flourished but feebly; like those connoisseurs of pictures who can judge them, who know the great masters, but who cannot even grind colours, I am struck by what is beautiful, I prize it, but I am none the less ignorant. I greatly fear, Sir, that you have too advantageous an opinion of me. A poet is easily caught up by the fire of his imagination, and it might easily happen that you created a phantom to whom you attributed a thousand qualities, but who would owe his existence only to the fecundity of your imagination.

I await your works in verse and prose with equal impatience. You will greatly increase, Sir, the gratitude I already owe you. You may give your productions to more enlightened persons but never to any that esteem them more highly. Your reputation places you above praise, but my feelings of admiration for you prevent me from being silent. You know, Sir, that when we feel something keenly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to hide it. I perceive so much modesty in your manner of speaking of your own works that I fear to shock it, even by saying only part of the truth.

I confess I should greatly like to see you, Sir, and

in your person to know the most accomplished product of the age and of France. But philosophy teaches me to curb this desire. Consideration for your health which, I am told, is delicate; your private arrangements, added to another motive which you may have for not turning your steps towards this country, are to me sufficient reasons for not pressing you on this subject. I love my friends with disinterested friendship and on all occasions I prefer their interest to my pleasure. It is sufficient that you give me the hope of seeing you once in my life. Your correspondence will take the place of your person; and I hope this will now be easier through the convenience of the posts.

I beg you, Sir, to inform me when you leave Holland for England. In that event you can remit your letters to our envoy, Borcke. I suffer deeply when I see a man of your deserts the victim and prey of human malignancy. The approbation I give you should, from this distance, stand to you in place of posterity's. Futile and poor consolation! Yet it has been that of all great men who before you have suffered from the hatred which base and envious souls feel for superior genius. My good wishes will follow you everywhere and the complete esteem I have for you, being founded on your merit, will only cease when it pleases the Creator to put an end to my existence. With these sentiments I am, Sir, your very perfectly affectionate friend.

VII

From Voltaire

Leiden, January, 1737

Monseigneur,

Were I unhappy I should soon be consoled. I am informed that your Royal Highness has been graciously pleased to send me your portrait; after the honour of enjoying your presence this is the most flattering event which could occur to me. But can any painter have been able to express in your features that noble spirit to which I have consecrated my homage? I hear that M. Chambrier withdrew the portrait from the post; but Madame la Marquise du Châtelet, Émilie, wrote him immediately that this treasure was destined for Cirey. She claims it, Monseigneur; she shares my admiration for your Royal Highness; she will not allow this precious gift to be taken away; it will form the chief ornament of the charming house she has built in her desert. On it will be read this little inscription: *Vultus Augusti, mens Trajani.*

Apparently, Monseigneur, the rumour of the present with which you have honoured me has caused a belief that I was in Prussia. All the gazettes say so; it is painful for me that in guessing my wish so well they have guessed my motions so ill. You cannot doubt, Monseigneur, the extreme desire I have to come and admire you more nearly; but I have already had the honour to inform you that I am detained here by an indispensable occupation. I am at

Leiden, Monseigneur, to render myself more worthy of your kindness, to strengthen myself in knowledge of those thingsyou favour. You love only truth and I seek it here. I shall take the liberty of sending your Royal Highness what small collection I may make; you will distinguish at a glance the good from the evil fruits.

Meanwhile, if your Royal Highness would be amused by a little sequel to the *Mondain* I shall have the honour to send it to you immediately; 'tis a little essay in worldly morals wherein I try to prove, with a certain amount of gaiety, that luxury, magnificence, the arts, all that makes for the splendour of a State also makes its wealth; and that those who cry out against what is called luxury are merely ill-tempered paupers. I think a State may be enriched by giving pleasure to its subjects. If this is an error, it appears to me hitherto a very pleasant one. But I shall know what I should think of it when I hear your Royal Highness's opinion. Indeed, Monseigneur, 'tis from pure humanity that I advise pleasures; my own are merely study and solitude. But there are a thousand ways of being happy. You deserve them all; and this is what I wish you, etc.

VIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Berlin, 16th January, 1737

No, Sir, I did not send you my portrait; such an idea never entered my mind. My portrait is neither

rare enough nor beautiful enough to be sent you. There has been a misunderstanding. I sent you, Sir, a trifling mark of my esteem, a bust of Socrates made for the handle of a stick; and this stick being rolled in the same packing as a picture gave rise to this error. This bust was in every respect more worthy of being sent to you than my portrait. 'Tis the image of the greatest man of antiquity, of a philosopher who was the glory of the Pagans, and who until our days has been the object of the jealousy and envy of the Christians. Socrates was calumniated; what great man is not? His mind, a lover of truth, lives again in you. So you alone deserve to keep this philosopher's bust. I hope, Sir, that you will keep it.

Madame la Marquise du Châtelet does me great honour by interesting herself on behalf of my supposed portrait. She will give me a better opinion of myself than I have ever had or ought to have. I ought rather to wish for her portrait. I confess that the charms of her mind caused me to forget its matter. You may perhaps feel that this is thinking too philosophically for my age, but you may be mistaken. The object's distance, the impossibility of possessing it, may have as much share in it as philosophy. But philosophy should not make us insensitive or prevent us from nourishing a tender heart; for in that case it would do men more harm than good.

Although you have no need to perfect yourself by new studies in knowledge of the sciences, I can well believe that the conversation of the famous M.

s'Gravesande may be very agreeable to you. He must possess Newton's Philosophy in its last perfection. M. Boerhaave will not be less useful to you in consultations on the state of your health. I urge this upon you, Sir. In addition to your natural desire for the preservation of your body, I beg you will give some new attention to that you already have for the love of a friend who is keenly interested in everything which concerns you. I dare to say that I know your worth, and I know how great your loss would be to the world; the regrets given to your ashes would be useless and superfluous in those who really felt them. I foresee and fear this misfortune; but I would have it delayed.

You will give me great pleasure, Sir, by sending me your new productions. Good trees always bear good fruit. *La Henriade* and your immortal works are a guarantee to me of the beauty of those in future. I am most curious to see that sequel to the *Mondain* you promise me. The plan you outline is entirely founded on reason and truth. Indeed, the Creator's wisdom has made nothing uselessly in this world. God desires that man should enjoy created things and to do otherwise is running contrary to His purpose. Only abuses and excesses render pernicious that which otherwise is good in itself.

My code of morals, Sir, fits in very happily with yours. I confess I love pleasures and all that contributes towards them. Life's brevity teaches me to enjoy them. We have only a little time to use. The past is only a dream, the future is uncertain; this is

not a dangerous principle, but we must not draw evil conclusions from it.

I expect your moral essay to be the history of my thoughts, although my greatest pleasure is the study and cultivation of the fine arts; you, Sir, better than anyone, know that they exact calm, tranquillity and repose of mind. I am for ever with all the consideration you deserve, Sir, your most affectionate friend.

IX

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 8th February, 1737

Sir,

Do not be concerned for the rumour which has been spread concerning my correspondence with you; this rumour can do no harm to either of us. It is true that superstitious persons, of whom there are so many in this country, perhaps more than anywhere else, have been scandalised by my corresponding with you; these persons suspect me moreover of not believing strictly all that they call articles of faith. Your enemies have prejudiced them so strongly by the calumnies they spread concerning you with the basest malice, that these good devotees damn in saintly-wise those who prefer you to Luther and Calvin and who carry the hardness of their hearts so far as to dare to write to you. To get rid of their importunity I thought the best course was to give

notice to the gazetteer of Holland and Amsterdam that I should be greatly pleased by his never mentioning my name.

This, Sir, is the truth about all that has happened; you can believe it wholly. I can assure you that I consider myself honoured by esteeming you and by doing homage to your genius. I would consent to print all the passages in my letters where I speak of you, to show the whole world that I do not blush to be enlightened by a man who can instruct me and whose sole fault is that of being superior to the rest of mankind. But, Sir, you do not need my feeble support to strengthen a reputation so well established by yourself. This foundation is more noble and more solid than that of my applause. In any other age than that in which we live I should not have forbidden Tronchin the liberty of talking about me in any way he pleased. He will never run the risk of being a Bajazet on Mount St Michael. 'Tis a rule of prudence; and you know, Sir, that we must yield to circumstances and adapt ourselves to the times. I have found myself obliged to practise this.

At the end of his *Métaphysique*, Wolff establishes the existence of a soul different from the body; he explains his views on immortality in these terms: "The soul having been created by God immediately and not successively, God can only destroy it by a formal act of His will." He seems to believe in the eternity of the world, although he speaks of it in terms which are not so clear as one might desire.

According to my feeble lights, the most obvious thing to say on this subject is that the world is eternal in time or in the succession of events; but that God, who is outside of time, must have existed before everything. What is absolutely certain is that the world is much older than we believe. If God willed its creation from all eternity, since willing and creation are in Him one and the same thing, it follows necessarily that the world is eternal. I beg, Sir, that you will not ask me what is meant by "eternal," for I confess beforehand that when I pronounce this term I use a word I do not understand myself. Metaphysical questions are above our capacity. We try vainly to guess at things which exceed our comprehension; and in this ignorant world the most probable conjecture passes for the best system.

Mine is to adore the Supreme Being, solely good, solely merciful, who by that alone deserves my homage; to soften and console, as much as I can, those human beings whose miserable condition is known to me, and, for the rest, to throw myself on the will of the Creator who will dispose of me as seems good to Him and from whom, whatever happens, I have nothing to fear. I believe that this is very nearly your own confession of faith.

If reason inspires me, if I dare to flatter myself that it speaks through my mouth, 'tis in a manner advantageous to you; it does you justice as the greatest man of France, and as a mortal who does honour to the word.

If ever I visit France the first thing I ask will be: "Where is M. de Voltaire?" The king, his court, Paris, Versailles, the fair sex, pleasures, will have no share in my journey; its object will be you alone. Allow me to attack you once more on the subject of *La Pucelle*. If you have enough confidence in me to believe me incapable of betraying a man whom I esteem, if you think me an honest man, you will not refuse it to me. This character is far too precious to me for me ever to violate it in my life; and those who know me know that I am neither indiscreet nor imprudent.

Continue to enlighten the world, Sir. The torch of truth could not be confided to better hands. I shall admire you from afar but yet not renounce the satisfaction of seeing you one day. This you promised me and I am determined to remind you of it some time.

Rely, Sir, upon my esteem; I do not commit myself lightly nor withdraw lightly. With these sentiments I am ever, Sir, your most affectionate friend.

X

From Voltaire

February, 1737

Monseigneur,

I have received your Royal Highness's charming letters and verses like those made by Catullus in

the time of Cæsar. Would you then excel in everything? I have learned that your Royal Highness has given me Socrates and not Frederick. Once more, Monseigneur, I detest the persecutors of Socrates without caring infinitely for that flat-nosed sage.

Socrate ne m'est rien, c'est Frédéric que j'aime.

How much difference is there between an Athenian prater with his familiar demon and a prince who is the delight of mankind and who will make their felicity!

At Amsterdam I met some Berliners. They spoke of your Royal Highness with transports of admiration. I make enquiries of everybody concerning your person. I say: *Ubi est Deus meus? Deus tuus*, they say, has the finest regiment in Europe; *Deus tuus* excels in arts and pleasures; he is more learned than Alcibiades, plays the flute like Telemachus, and is far above these two Greeks; and then, like old Simeon I say: When will mine eyes see my salvation!

I ought already to have sent your Royal Highness the promised *Philosophie* and the *Pucelle* I did not promise; but first of all, Monseigneur, believe me, I have not had a free moment. Secondly, the *Pucelle* and the *Philosophie* lead directly to the hemlock. Thirdly, you must know that the curiosity you excite in Europe, both as a prince and as a thinking being, continually has its eye upon you. Our movements and our words are watched; everything is reported, everything is known.

There are some charming verses attributed to

Augustus-Virgil-Frederick going about the world; where Tournemine is made to say:

> Il avouera, voyant cette figure immense,
> Que la matière pense.[1]

Your Royal Highness did not send me that. How do I know it? Believe me, Monseigneur, every foreign minister, however attached to you he may be, however amiable, will sacrifice everything to the paltry merit of giving news to the superiors who employ him. This said, I will send to Wesel the parcel which I dare to address to your Royal Highness; but allow me to repeat to you, like Lucretius to Memmius:

> Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum![2]

That verse should be the book's motto. You are the only prince in the world to whom I would dare to send it. Consider me, Monseigneur, as the most faithful servant you have; for I have not and will not have any other master. After that, decide.

I am leaving Holland immediately, against my will; friendship recalls me to Cirey; even here I have been hunted down. The greatest prince in the world has become my confidant. If your Royal Highness has any orders to give me I beg you will address them under cover to M. Du Brueil at Amsterdam; he will forward them to me. They will arrive late; so, in

[1] Seeing this immense face, he will admit that matter thinks.

[2] Religion could persuade to so many evils.

my complaints of Providence, there will be a special one on the extreme injustice of not having placed Cirey in Prussia. I am with the most tender veneration, Monseigneur, etc.

XI

From Voltaire

March, 1737

Monseigneur,

I know not where to begin; I am intoxicated with pleasure, with surprise, with gratitude:

Pollio et ipse nova carmina; pascite taurum.

You write in Berlin French verses such as were made in Versailles in the age of good taste and pleasures. You send me M. Wolff's *Métaphysique* and I dare to say that your Royal Highness may have translated it yourself. You send M. von Borcke into the heart of my solitude; you understand how a man worthy of your benevolence must be dear to me. I received simultaneously four letters from your Royal Highness; the bust of Socrates is at Cirey; I am dazzled by so many favours; it is with difficulty that I collect myself sufficiently to thank you.

Monseigneur, Augustus of old wrote verses for Horace and Virgil; but Augustus was sullied by proscriptions: Charles IX made verses, and tolerably good ones for Ronsard; but Charles IX was guilty at least of having permitted Saint Bartholomew, which

was worse than proscriptions. I will only compare you to our Henry the Great, to Francis I. Doubtless, Monseigneur, you know the charming song of Henry the Great to his mistress:

Recevez ma couronne,
Le prix de ma valeur :
Je la tiens de Bellone,
Tenez-la de mon cœur.[1]

These are the models of men and kings; and you will surpass them. M. von Borcke touched my heart by all he told me of your Royal Highness; but he told me nothing I did not know.

You will perceive, Monseigneur, that owing to my journey your letters were late in reaching me. Madame du Châtelet received them with the Socrates. M. Thiériot could have taken the parcel sooner from the post; but M. Chambrier withheld it and, thinking it was your portrait, naturally wished to keep it. Émilie is in despair that it is only Socrates. Monseigneur, the palace of Cirey flatters itself that it will be decorated by the image of the only prince we esteem in the world. Émilie expects it; she deserves it, and you are just.

M. Thiériot also thought I had gone to Prussia. The excess of your kindness to me induced many people to think so. The news was inserted in the gazettes nearly a month ago. But, Monseigneur, the penetration of your mind will have caused you to

[1] Take my crown, My valour's prize : I took it from War, Take it from my heart.

guess my character; I am sure you will do me the justice of being certain that I have the greatest desire to wait upon you, but that I have no intention of doing so. I am incapable of making such an undertaking without precise commands.

Your person and the court of the king your father, Monseigneur, must necessarily attract strangers; but a man of letters who is attached to you must not come without orders.

Assuredly I did not mean to leave Cirey a month ago. Mme du Châtelet whose mind is cast in the same mould as yours, and who assuredly has an elective affinity with you, must detain me in her court which I unhesitatingly prefer to that of all the kings of the earth, as a friend, as a philosopher and as a free man.

A tempest tore me from this happy retreat; calumny sought me out even in Cirey. I have been persecuted ever since I wrote *La Henriade*. Will you believe that more than once I have been reproached with painting Saint Bartholomew in colours too odious? I have been called an atheist because I said men were not born to destroy each other. The tempest increased and I left by the advice of my best friends. I had sketched out the comparatively simple principles of the *Philosophie de Newton;* Mme du Châtelet had her share in the work; Minerva dictated and I wrote. I came to Leiden with the purpose of labouring to make the work less unworthy of her and of you. I came to Amsterdam to get it printed and to superintend the illustrations. This will occupy

me the whole winter. That is my history and my occupation. Your Royal Highness's kindness demanded this explanation.

At first I was in Holland under an assumed name to avoid visits, new acquaintances and the loss of time; but the gazettes repeated the damaging rumours circulated by my enemies and I determined immediately to confound them and to give them the lie by making myself known.

In the letters I received from your Royal Highness I notice among many princely and philosophical strokes that you say: *Cæsar est supra grammaticam.* That is very true; it is indeed befitting that a prince should not be a purist but it is not befitting to write and spell like a woman. A prince should receive the best education in everything; and because Louis XIV knew nothing, because he did not know even the language of his own country I conclude that he was ill-educated. He was born with a mind both wise and exact; but he was only taught to dance and to play the guitar. He never read; if he had read, if he had known history, you would have fewer Frenchmen in Berlin. Your kingdom would not have been enriched in 1686 by the spoils of his. He would not have hearkened so much to the Jesuit Le Tellier; he would have, etc., etc., etc.

Either your education has been worthy of your genius, Monseigneur, or you have supplied it entirely yourself. At this moment there is not a prince in the world who thinks as you do. I am sorry you have no rivals. I am, for my whole lifetime, etc.

XII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 6th March, 1737

Sir,

I was very agreeably surprised by the verses you were kind enough to send me; they are worthy of the author. The most sterile subject becomes fertile in your hands. You speak of me and I no longer recognise myself; all you touch turns to gold.

Who would know that Alexander the Great existed if Quintus Curtius and other famous historians had not been careful to transmit to us the history of his life? The valiant Achilles and the wise Nestor would not have escaped the oblivion of time, had they not been celebrated by Homer. I assure you I am no sort of great man nor even a candidate for one; I am but a simple person known only to a small part of the continent; whose name, in all probability, will only serve to decorate a genealogical tree and will then fall into obscurity and oblivion. I am surprised at my own imprudence when I remember that I have sent you verses. I disapprove of my temerity and at the same time fall into the same faults.

I beg, Sir, that you will be my master in poetry as you are able to be in everything. You will never find an easier or more docile disciple than I am. Far from being offended at your corrections, I shall consider

them the most certain evidence of your friendship for me.

Complete leisure gives me time to study any science which pleases me. I try to profit by this idleness and to make it useful by devoting myself to the study of philosophy and history and by amusing myself with poetry and music. I am now living like a man, and I find this life infinitely preferable to the majestic gravity and constrained tyranny of courts. I dislike a life measured out by the yard; liberty alone attracts me.

In recent times the only truly educated prince was the Tsar Peter I. He was not only the legislator of his country, but he understood perfectly all naval science. He was an architect, an anatomist, a surgeon (sometimes a dangerous one), an expert soldier, a consummate economist; in short, to make him the model of all princes, he only needed an education less barbarous and ferocious than that he received in a country where absolute authority was only known through its cruelty.

I have been informed that you are a lover of painting; and for this reason I sent you the head of Socrates which is rather well designed. I hope you will be pleased with my intention.

Foreign ministers, I know, are the privileged spies at Court. My confidence is not blind nor lacking in foresight in this matter. How can you have the epigram I wrote about M. La Croze? I only gave it to him. This fat, amiable *savant* was the cause of this jest; 'twas a sally of the imagination whose

point consists in a rather trivial play on words and was only passable under the circumstances in which I wrote it, but elsewhere is insipid. Father Tournemine's piece is to be found in the Bibliothèque Française. M. La Croze had read it. He hates the Jesuits as the Christians hate the devil and esteems none of the religious orders except the congregation of Saint-Maur, an order to which he once belonged.

So you have left Holland. I shall feel the weight of this double distance. Your letters will be scarcer and a thousand distressing obstacles will combine to render our correspondence less frequent. I will make use of Du Breuil's address which you give me. I shall urge him to accelerate as much as he can the sending of my letters and the return of yours.

May you enjoy all the pleasures of life at Cirey! Your happiness will never equal that of my good wishes nor your deserts. I beg you will inform Madame la Marquise du Châtelet that I can bring myself to yield M. de Voltaire only to her and that she alone is worthy to possess you.

Even if Cirey were at the other end of the world I should not renounce the satisfaction of visiting it one day. Kings have travelled for slighter reasons, and I assure you that my curiosity equals the esteem I have for you. Is it surprising that I should desire to see a man who is the most worthy of immortality and who derives it from himself?

I have just received letters from Berlin and I am informed that the Emperor's resident has received

La Pucelle in print. Do not accuse me of indiscretion. I am with all possible esteem, Sir, your most affectionate friend.

XIII

From Voltaire

March, 1737

Deliciae humani generis, this title is dearer to you than that of Monseigneur, Royal Highness and Majesty, and is equally your due.

I must first inform your Royal Highness of my movements; for I have decided to become your subject. We Catholics have a kind of Sacrament which we call Confirmation; we choose a saint to be our patron in Heaven, a sort of tutelary God; I should like to know why I should be permitted to choose a little god rather than a king. You are made to be my king, much more assuredly than Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Dominic are made to be my saints. Therefore I write to my king and I inform you, *Rex amate*, that I have returned to your little province of Cirey where dwell Philosophy, the Graces, Liberty and Study. Nothing is lacking but your Majesty's portrait. You do not give it to us, you will not allow us to have graven images to bow down before, as saith the Holy Scripture. I have seen the Socrates which your Royal Highness has deigned to present to me; this present made me re-read

all that Plato says of Socrates. I am still of my first opinion:

> La Grèce, je l'avoue, eut un brillant destin ;
> Mais Frédéric est né ; tout change ; je me flatte
> Qu'Athènes, quelque jour, doit céder à Berlin ;
> Et déjà Frédéric est plus grand que Socrate.[1]

as free from popular superstitions, as modest as he was vain. You do not go to a Lutheran church to get yourself hailed as the wisest of men; you limit yourself to doing all that is needed to be so. You do not go from house to house, like Socrates, telling the master he is a fool, the teacher that he is an ass, the little boy that he is ignorant; you content yourself with thinking it of most of the animals called men and yet, in spite of that, you think of how to make them happy.

I learn that your Royal Highness has recently done justice to M. Wolff. You immortalise your name; you render it dear to all ages by protecting the enlightened philosopher against the absurd and intriguing theologian. Continue, great prince, great man; overthrow the monster of superstition and fanaticism, that true enemy of divinity and of reason. Be the king of philosophers; other princes are only kings of men.

Every day I thank Heaven that you exist. Louis XIV (whose history in manuscript I shall one day have the honour to send your Royal Highness) spent the last years of his life in miserable disputes about a

[1] Greece, I confess, had a brilliant destiny ;
But Frederick was born ; all is changed ; I flatter myself
That one day Athens must yield to Berlin ;
Already Frederick is greater than Socrates.

ridiculous Papal Bull in which he was interested without knowing why; he died plagued by priests who excommunicated each other with the wildest and most senseless zeal. To this our princes are exposed; ignorance, mother of superstition, leaves them victims to false devotees. The knowledge you possess places you beyond their attacks.

I have read M. Wolff's *Métaphysique* with great attention. Great prince, may I tell you what I think? I think that you were graciously pleased to translate it;[1] I observed little corrections from your hand. Émilie has just read it with me.

C'est de votre Athènes nouvelle
Que ce trésor nous est venu;
Mais Versailles n'en a rien su;
Ce trésor n'est pas fait pour elle.[2]

Émilie, worthy of Frederick, here adds her admiration and her respect for the only prince she thinks worthy of being a prince; but this makes her the more distressed at not possessing your Royal Highness's portrait. Something is now ready according to your orders. I am sending it straight to the post-master of Trèves, without its passing through Paris; and from there it will go to Wesel. Pray give me your orders if you wish me to make use of this way. I am with profound respect, etc.

[1] The translation was by Suhm.

[2] 'Tis from your new Athens
This treasure comes to us;
Versailles knew nothing of it;
It was not made for Versailles.

XIV

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 7th April, 1737

Sir,

Even your manner of sealing proves to me your obliging intentions to me. You write to me in an extremely flattering tone; you overwhelm me with praises; you give me titles which only belong to great men; and I faint under the weight of these praises.

My empire, Sir, will indeed be small if it is made up only of subjects of your merit. Are kings needed to govern philosophers? The ignorant to lead the educated? In a word, men filled with passions to curb the vices of those who suppress them, not from fear of punishment, not from the childish dread of hell and devils, but from love of virtue?

Reason is your guide; Reason is your sovereign; and Henry the Great, the saint who protects you. Any other aid would be superfluous. Yet if through the post I occupy I saw myself in a position to prove to you what feelings I have for you, you would find me a saint never invoked in vain. I shall begin by giving you a little specimen. It seems that you wish to have my portrait; you desire it, it is already ordered.

To show you how much the arts are honoured among us, you must know, Sir, that we try to ennoble

all of them. One of my gentlemen named Knobelsdorff whose talents are not limited to handling the pencil, is making this portrait. He knows that he is working for you and that you are a connoisseur; 'tis a spur sufficient to incite him to surpass himself. One of my intimate friends, Baron von Keyserlingk, or Césarion, will bring you my effigy. He will reach Cirey about the end of next month. When you see him, you will judge whether he does not deserve the esteem of every honest man. I beg, Sir, that you will confide in him. He is instructed to press you earnestly for *La Pucelle*, the *Philosophie de Newton*, the *History of Louis XIV*, and all he can extort from you.

Love of truth and horror of injustice made me take M. Wolff's part. The naked truth has little power over most men's minds; it needs the support of rank and of dignity and the protection of the great.

M. Wolff has been persecuted by ignorance, by fanaticism, by superstition and blind zeal. They imputed crimes to him until at last the world began to perceive the dawn of his innocence.

I will not claim a glory to which I am not entitled nor be vain of the merit which belongs to another. I can assure you that I did not translate M. Wolff's *Métaphysique;* this honour is due to one of my friends. A chain of circumstances has led him to Russia where he has been for some months, although he deserved a better fate. I have no share in this achievement except that I was the cause of it and

corrected it. The copyist now has the remainder of this translation; I expect it every day and you shall soon have it.

Émilie's remembrance is very flattering to me. I beg you to assure her that I nourish the most distinguished feelings for her,

> Car l'Europe la compte au rang des plus grands hommes.[1]
> Henriade, Book II, verse 70.

What can I refuse Newton-Venus, the highest knowledge decked with the charms of beauty, grace and attractions? The Marquise du Châtelet desires my portrait (I should rather ask for hers); I grant it. Each stroke of the brush will bear witness to my admiration for her.

I send this letter by way of Du Breuil, to the address you gave me.

When will the time come when the greatest man in France will not need such precautions? Will your fellow-countrymen alone deny you the glory that is due you? Leave your ungrateful country and come to a land where you will be adored. Let your talents find their reward in this Athens.

Your letters give me infinite pleasure; but I confess I should greatly prefer the satisfaction of conversing with you and of assuring you by word of mouth of the perfect esteem with which I am ever, Sir, your most affectionate friend.

[1] For Europe ranks her among its greatest men.

XV

From Voltaire

17th April, 1737

Monseigneur,

I do not think there is any demonstration properly so called of the existence of the Supreme Being independent of matter. I remember that in England I did not fail to embarrass the famous Dr. Clarke when I said to him: We cannot call that a demonstration which is only a chain of ideas leaving many difficulties. To say that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides is a demonstration which, however complicated it may be, leaves no difficulty; but the existence of a Creative Being leaves difficulties insurmountable to the human mind. Therefore this truth cannot be placed among demonstrations properly so called. It is a truth I believe; but I believe it as being the most probable; 'tis a light which strikes me amid a thousand shadows.

Many things might be said on this topic, but it is carrying gold to Peru to fatigue your Royal Highness with philosophical reflections.

All metaphysics, in my opinion, contain two things: The first all that men of good sense know; the second what they will never know.

For example we know what constitutes a simple and a composite idea; we shall never know what

the being is which has these ideas. We measure bodies; we shall never know what matter is. We can only judge of this by analogy; 'tis a staff nature has given to the blind and with it we walk and also fall.

Analogy teaches me that animals, being made as I am, having sentiments like me, ideas like me, may well be what I am. When I try to go beyond I find an abyss and I halt on the edge of the precipice. All I know is, whether matter be eternal (which is quite incomprehensible), whether it was created in time (which is subject to great difficulties), whether our soul perishes with us, or enjoys immortality—in these uncertainties you cannot choose a wiser course or one more worthy of yourself than that you take, which is to give your soul, whether it be perishable or not, all the virtues, all the pleasures, all the instruction of which it is capable, to live as a prince, as a man, as a sage, to be happy and to render others happy. I look upon you as a present sent from Heaven to earth. I am amazed that at your age you are not carried away with a tastte for pleasure and I congratulate you infinitely that philosophy leaves you the taste for pleasure. We are not born solely to read Plato and Leibnitz, to measure curves and to arrange facts in our heads; we are born with hearts which must be filled, with passions which must be satisfied without our being dominated by them. Monseigneur, I am charmed with your system of morals! My heart feels it was born only to be a subject of yours.

One of the greatest benefits you can confer upon

mankind is to trample under foot superstition and fanaticism; not to allow a man in a gown to persecute others who do not think as he does. It is quite certain that philosophers never trouble States. Why then trouble philosophers? What did it matter to Holland that Bayle was right? Why must it be that a fanatical minister like Jurieu had the interest to tear Bayle from his little fortune? Philosophers ask for nothing but tranquillity; they only wish to live in peace under the established government, and there is not a theologian who does not wish to be master of the State. Is it possible that men who have no knowledge save the gift of speaking without understanding themselves or being understood, should have dominated and still do dominate almost everywhere?

The northern countries have this advantage over the south of Europe, that these tyrants of souls have there less power than elsewhere. The princes of the north, therefore, are generally less superstitious and less malevolent than elsewhere. An Italian prince will deal in poison and then go to confession. Protestant Germany does not produce such fools and such monsters; and in general I should have no difficulty in proving that the least superstitious kings have always been the best princes.

You see, worthy heir of the spirit of Marcus Aurelius, with what liberty I dare to speak to you. You are almost the only person in the world who deserves to be spoken to thus.

XVI

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 8th May, 1737

Sir,

I have just received your letter of the 17th April; it reached me quite soon; I do not know why mine are so long on the way.

I am sending you the remainder of the translation of Wolff down to paragraph 770. You shall have the end from my dear Césarion, my little ambassador to the province of Reason, to the Earthly Paradise. I would not seek the sovereign good in the glitter of magnificence, but in pure pleasure and in the society of the most reasonable of human beings; in a word if I were free to dispose of my person I should myself come to Cirey and reason to my heart's content. I rank you at the head of all thinking beings; surely it would be difficult for the Creator to produce a more sublime spirit than yours.

My portrait will be finished to-day; the painter is striving to do his best. Can I end my letter without inserting a message for Émilie? I beg you will assure her of my perfect esteem. You must let me have her portrait; for I should not dare to ask it of her. If my body could travel like my thoughts, I would assure you by word of mouth of the perfect esteem and consideration with which I am, etc.

XVII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

14th May, 1737

Sir,

I willingly abandon to you the divine Plato, the divine Aristotle and all the heroes of scholastic philosophy. They were men who took refuge in words to hide their ignorance. Their disciples believed them on their reputation; and whole centuries have been content to talk without understanding what they said. In our days words may only be used in their rigid meaning. M. Wolff gives the definition of each word and defines its usage; by fixing his terms he forestalls many disputes which often arise from a mere play on words or from the different meaning people attach to them.

Nothing could be truer than what you say of metaphysics; but in spite of this, I must confess that I cannot forbid my mind, which is naturally curious and eager for novelties, from enquiring into matters which greatly interest it and which attract it by the very difficulties they present.

You tell me in the most polite way that I am stupid. I have often thought so before now; but I begin to be convinced of it. To speak seriously, you are not wrong; what is this Reason, that prerogative of which men are so proud? Who possesses it? Men, who, in order to live together, have been obliged to choose superiors and to make laws in order to learn that it is

unjuſt to kill, to rob, etc. These reasonable men make war upon each other, for vain arguments they do not underſtand; these reasonable beings have a hundred religions each more absurd than the one before; they like to live long and complain of boredom and the length of time during their whole life. Are these the results of that Reason which diſtinguishes them from the brutes?

You may object to me the learned discoveries of geometers, the calculations of M. Bernoulli and of Newton; but in what respect were they more reasonable than ours? They spent their lives in seeking algebraic propositions, the relations of numbers; and they derived no profit from the brief duration of life.

How much I approve a philosopher who can relax with Émilie! I am sure I should infinitely prefer her acquaintance to that of the centre of gravity, the squaring of the circle, potable gold and the sin against the Holy Ghost.

You speak, Sir, of the princes of the north like a learned man. Unqueſtionably they owe much to Luther and Calvin (who are otherwise poor creatures) who freed them from the yoke of prieſts and the Roman court, and who greatly increased their revenues by the secularisation of ecclesiaſtical property. Yet their religion is by no means purified from superſtition and bigotry. We have a sect of sanctimonious creatures not unlike the Presbyterians of England, who are the more insupportable in that they damn with much orthodoxy and without appeal all those not of their opinion. One is obliged to hide his sentiments to

avoid making enemies inopportunely. 'Tis a common proverb in every man's mouth to say: That man has neither faith nor law. That alone is equivalent to the sentence of a Council. You are condemned without being heard and persecuted without being known. Moreover to attack a country's received religion is to attack men's self-love in its last trench, for this makes them prefer an accepted sentiment and the faith of their fathers to any other belief, however much more reasonable than their own.

I think as you do, Sir, about M. Bayle. The unworthy Jurieu who persecuted him, forgot the first duty of every religion, which is charity. M. Bayle appeared to me the more estimable because he belonged to the sect of Academe, who simply recorded the pro and con of questions without deciding rashly about subjects which we can no more discover than the abyss.

I seem to see you glass in hand, at table, recollecting your friend. It is more flattering to me that you should drink my health than to see erected in my honour the temples which were erected to Augustus. Brutus was contented with the approbation of Cato; the applause of a wise man suffices me.

My little ambassador will soon leave for Cirey, furnished with credentials and the portrait you insisted on having. His departure has been delayed by military duties. He is like the Messiah; I continually announce him and he never comes. I beg you will hand him anything you are good enough to confide to my discretion. I am, with very perfect esteem, Sir, your affectionate friend.

XVIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Nauen, 25th May, 1737

Sir,

I have just furnished my dear Césarion with everything necessary for his journey to Cirey. He brings you the portrait you insisted on having. Only the unfortunate materialism of my body prevents my spirit from accompanying him.

Césarion had the misfortune to be born a Courlander (Baron von Keyserlingk, his father, is Marshal to the Duke of Courland's court) but he is the Plutarch of that modern Beotia. I commend him earnestly to you. Have every confidence in him; he possesses the rare advantage of being both discreet and a man of wit.

Were I envious I should envy Césarion his journey. One thing which consoles me is the idea of seeing him return like the leader of the Argonauts who carried off the treasures of Colchis. What joy for me when he brings me *La Pucelle*, the *Reign of Louis XIV*, the *Philosophie de Newton* and the other unknown wonders you have not yet thought fit to communicate to the public! Do not deprive me of this consolation. You who desire the happiness of mankind so ardently will not refuse to contribute to mine. In my opinion agreeable reading is of great importance to true happiness.

Pray present my regards to Venus-Newton. Science could never be better lodged than in the body of an

amiable person. What philosopher could resist her argument? In allowing ourselves to be guided by this amiable philosopher shall we always be guided by Reason? For my part, I should greatly fear the gilded shafts of the little Cytherean god.

Césarion will inform you of my perfect esteem for you; he will tell you how much we honour virtue, merit and talents. I beg you will believe all that he says on my behalf; and be certain that he cannot exaggerate the consideration with which I am, Sir, your most affectionate friend.

XIX

From Voltaire

Cirey, 27th May, 1737

Monseigneur,

In the little paradise of Cirey we await impatiently two things which are very rare in France—the portrait of a prince such as you, and M. de Keyserlingk, whom your Royal Highness honours with the name of your intimate friend.

Louis XIV said one day to a man who had rendered important services to Charles II, King of Spain, and who had been one of his familiars: "Then the King of Spain loved you?" "Ah! Sire," replied the poor courtier, "Do kings love anything?"

You, Monseigneur, would have all the virtues which are so uselessly desired in kings and for which they have always been praised so inopportunely; it

is not enough to be superior to men in mind as well as in rank, you are so in the heart. You, prince and friend! There are two great titles joined together which hitherto have been thought incompatible.

Yet I have always dared to think that princes could feel pure friendship, for usually private men who pretend to be friends are rivals. We have always something to quarrel about: Fame, position, women, and above all the favours of you masters of the earth, which we struggle for even more than for those of women, who nevertheless are quite as valuable as you are. But it seems to me that a prince, especially a prince like you, has nothing to quarrel over, has no rival to fear, and can feel friendship without embarrassment and at his ease. Happy is he, Monseigneur, who can share the bounties of a heart like yours! Doubtless M. de Keyserlingk has nothing to desire. My only surprise is that he should travel.

Cirey, Monseigneur, is also a little temple dedicated to Friendship. Madame du Châtelet, who I assure you possesses all the virtues of a great man with the graces of her sex, is not unworthy of his visit and will receive him as the Friend of Prince Frederick.

I reproach myself for having said nothing in my letters to your Royal Highness of French literature, in which you deign to take an interest; but I live in a profound solitude near the most estimable lady of this age and the books of the last; in my solitude I have received no novelties which deserve to be sent to Mount Remus.

Our Belles Lettres begin to degenerate considerably,

either because they lack encouragement or because the French, having found the good in the age of Louis XIV, are always so unfortunate as to seek the best; or because in all countries nature reposes after great efforts, like the fields after an abundant harvest.

That part of philosophy which is the most useful to men—that which treats of the soul—will never be of any value among us so long as we cannot think freely. A certain number of superstitious people here do great damage to every truth. Only the Jesuits are permitted to say anything; and if your Royal Highness has read what they say, I doubt whether you will do them the same honour you have done M. Rollin.[1] History can only be well written in a free country; but most of the French refugees in Holland and in England have corrupted the purity of their language.

Our universities have no merit but their antiquity. The French have no Wolff, no MacLaurin, no Manfredi, no s'Gravesande, no Muschenbroek. Most of our professors of physics are not worthy to study under those I have just named. The Academy of Sciences well sustains the honour of the nation, but 'tis a light insufficiently diffused; each academician is limited to his own particular views. We have neither good physics nor good principles of astronomy for the education of youth and, for this purpose, we are compelled to rely on foreigners.

The Opera keeps up its standard, because music is

[1] Frederick had sent Thiériot to congratulate Rollin on his behalf.

liked; unfortunately, this music cannot please the taste of other nations, like the Italian. Comedy degenerates completely. A propos Comedy, I am greatly mortified that *L'Enfant Prodigue*[1] should have been sent to your Royal Highness. The copy you have is not my real work; and the true copy is only a sketch I have had neither time nor desire to finish, and is unworthy your attention.

I speak to your Royal Highness with that naturalness which is perhaps too native to my character; I tell you, Monseigneur, what I think of my country without desiring to disparage or to praise it; I think that the French are living in Europe a little on their credit, like a rich man who is imperceptibly ruining himself. Our nation needs for its encouragement the eye of a master; for my part, Monseigneur, I ask nothing more than that Prince Frederick should continue his supervision. I lack only health; but for that I should work hard to deserve your regard; but feeble genius and ill-health make but a poor man. I am with profound respect, etc.

XX

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Ruppin, 6th July, 1737

Sir,

Cowled antiquarians will never be my historiographers nor the directors of my conscience. How

[1] A comedy by Voltaire.

different is your manner of thinking from that of these agents of iniquity! You love truth, they love superstition; you practise virtues, they are content to teach them; they calumniate, you forgive. Were I a Catholic I should choose for my patron saint neither Saint Francis of Assisi nor Saint Bruno; I should go straight to Cirey where I should find virtues and talents superior in every respect to those of the hair-shirt and the monk's frock.

I wish you might be the tutor of princes, that you might teach them to be men, to have tender hearts, that you might show them the true value of rank and the duty which bids them contribute to the happiness of mankind.

My poor Césarion has been delayed by gout, he has got rid of it as best he can and has set out for Cirey. It is for you to judge whether he deserves my friendship.

In taking leave of my little friend, I said to him: "Think, you are going to the Earthly Paradise, to a sojourn a thousand times more delightful than the island of Calypso; that its goddess yields nothing in beauty to the enchantress of Telemachus; that in her you will find all the pleasures of the mind, so preferable to those of the body; that this marvel among women spends her leisure in the search for truth. There you will see the human mind in its highest degree of perfection, wisdom without austerity, surrounded by Mirth and the tender Loves. On one side you will see the sublime Voltaire and on the other

the amiable author of the *Mondain;* he who can raise himself above Newton and yet without derogation can sing of Phyllis. Ah! my dear Césarion, how shall I be able to drag you from a place so filled with delights? How feeble will the bonds of old friendship be against so many charms!"

My interests are in your hands; it is for you, Sir, to return me my friend. He is perhaps the only human being worthy to become a citizen of Cirey; but remember he is all I have, and that it would be a crying injustice to deprive me of him.

It seems to me that the decline of taste in France is not so general as you believe. The French have still an Apollo at Cirey; Fontenelle, Crébillon, Rollin for clarity and beauty of historical style; Olivet for translation; Bernard and Gresset, whose polite and natural muses happily replace Chaulieu and La Fare. If Gresset sometimes sins against exactitude, he is excused by the fire which carries him away; he is so full of thoughts that he neglects words. Nature makes few accomplished works and how few are the Voltaires! I had nearly forgotten M. de Réaumur who is in great repute with us as a physician. This seems to me the quintessence of your great men. The others do not seem to me very deserving of attention. Belles Lettres are no longer rewarded as they were in the time of Louis the Great.

I do not think that metaphysics will ever be successful except in England. You have your bigots and we have ours. Germany lacks neither the superstitious

nor fanatics obstinate in their prejudices and maleficent to the last degree and who are the more incorrigible because their stupid ignorance prevents the use of their reason. One must needs be prudent in the company of such people. A man, were he the most honest man in the world, is generally decried if he is reputed not to be religious. Religion is the idol of peoples; they adore everything they do not understand. Whoever dares to touch it with a profane hand draws down upon himself their hatred and is an abomination to them.

We owe the revival of sciences to the French. After cruel wars, the establishment of Christianity and the frequent invasions of barbarians had dealt a mortal blow to the arts which had fled from Greece to Italy, centuries of ignorance passed by until at last the torch was lighted among you. Is it not just that other nations should recognise the obligation they have to France for the service she rendered them all generally ?

As to the Germans their defect is not a lack of mind. Good sense has fallen to their share; and their character approaches that of the English. The Germans are laborious and profound; when once they take hold of a subject, they lean heavily upon it. Their books are tediously diffuse. If they could be corrected of their heaviness and familiarised a little more with the graces I should not despair of my nation's producing great men. But there is one difficulty which will always prevent our having good books in our language; and that is because the use of

words is not fixed and, since Germany is divided among a vaſt number of sovereigns, there will never be any way of bringing these sovereigns to submit to the decisions of an Academy.

There is no resource for our learned men except to write in foreign languages, and since it is very difficult to know them thoroughly, 'tis to be feared our literature will never make great progress. And there is another difficulty as great as the firſt—the princes as a rule despise the learned. The lack of care in their dress among these gentlemen, the library duſt with which they are covered, the lack of proportion between a head furnished with good writing and the vacant brain of these princes, cause them to make fun of the outward shell of the learned while the great man escapes them. The judgment of princes is too much reſpected by courtiers for them to dream of thinking in a different manner; and they also take it upon themselves to scorn those who are worth a thousand times more than they are.

For my part I do not feel made for the age in which we live, but I content myself with not imitating the example of my equals. I continually preach to them that pride is the height of ignorance; and, recognising the superiority of you great men, I hold you worthy of my praise; and you, Sir, of all my eſteem. Consider me as a diſintereſted friend whose acquaintance you owe to your merit alone. I write to you with one foot in the ſtirrup, at the point of leaving. I shall be back in a fortnight. I am ever, Sir, your moſt affectionate friend.

XXI

From Voltaire

July, 1737

Monseigneur,

I am surrounded with your benefits, M. de Keyserlingk, your Royal Highness's portrait, the second part of M. Wolff's *Métaphysique*, M. de Beausobre's *Dissertation*, and above all the charming letter you deigned to write to me from Ruppin on the 6th of July. With these I can bid defiance to the fever and languor which consume me; and I perceive that a man may be happy even when suffering.

Your amiable ambassador has recovered from the gout; we are about to lose him; he came only to leave us the regret of his departure; he is returning to the prince he loves and by whom he is beloved; he leaves an eternal memory at Cirey and the reign of Frederick strongly established. He brings my tribute; I gave all I had. It is said that there are tyrants who rob their subjects; but good subjects gladly give good princes all they have.

I would gladly have joined *La Pucelle* to the remainder of the tribute; your ambassador will tell you that this is impossible. For more than a year this little work has been in the hands of Madame la Marquise du Châtelet, who will not give it up. The friendship with which she honours me will not suffer her to risk something which might separate me from her for ever; she has renounced everything to live

with me in solitude and ſtudy; she knows that the leaſt knowledge of this work would invariably arouse a ſtorm. She dreads every accident; she knows that M. de Keyserlingk was under observation at Strasburg and that this will happen again on his return; she knows he is watched, that he might be searched; above all she knows you would not risk the misfortune of your two subjects at Cirey for the sake of a jeſt in rhyme. Your Royal Highness would find the tone of this little poem slightly different from the *Age of Louis XIV* and the *Philosophie de Newton; sed dulce est desipere in loco.* Woe to philosophers who cannot un-knit their brows! I consider auſterity a disease; I would a thousand times rather languish with fever, as I do, than think gloomily. I believe virtue, ſtudy and gaiety are three ſiſters who should not be separated, these three divinities are your handmaids; I take them as miſtresses.

You cannot realise, Monseigneur, what a consolation it is for Madame du Châtelet and myself to perceive how much you think as a philosopher should, how much your virtue deteſts superſtition. If moſt kings have encouraged fanaticism in their dominions it is because they are ignorant and because they do not know that prieſts are their greateſt enemies.

For my part, when I reflect on the feebleness and the folly of mankind I am always amazed that in the ages of ignorance the Popes did not eſtablish a universal monarchy.

I am convinced that now all a sovereign need do is to suppress all the seeds of religious fury and ecclesi-

astical discord. He needs only to be an honest man and to eschew devotion; fools as men are, they know in their hearts that virtue is better than devotion. Under a pious king there are only hypocrites; a king who is an honest man forms men like himself.

XXII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 16th August, 1737

Where do you find time for so much work? Either your moments are worth thrice those of other men or your happy and fertile genius surpasses that of most great men. Scarcely have you illuminated the Philosophy of Newton when you enrich the French stage with a new tragedy; and ere that play has quitted the stocks it is followed by a new work which you plan.

I have just seen in Berlin a man with whom I conversed about you at length. It is our Minister Borcke who has returned from England. He greatly alarmed me about your health; he was never tired of speaking of the pleasure your conversation had given him. The mind, he says, triumphs over the infirmities of the body. According to your description of Cirey, I seem to see the description and history of my own solitude. Rheinsberg is a little Cirey, Sir, except that we have neither Voltaire nor Madame du Châtelet among us.

In the flower of my youth an amiable creature inspired me with two passions at once; you perceive that one was love and the other poetry. This little miracle of nature possessed, with all possible graces, both taſte and delicacy. She tried to communicate them to me. I succeeded well enough in love, but badly in poetry. Since then I have often been in love and always a poet.

If you know any secret to cure men of this mania you would perform a truly Chriſtian work by communicating it to me; if not I condemn you to teach me the rules of this enchanting art which you have embellished and which in turn has done you so much honour.

How fortunate is Césarion! He muſt have spent delightful moments at Cirey. What pleasures indeed surpass those of the mind? I made surprising efforts of the imagination to accompany him; but my imagination is not sufficiently keen nor my spirit tenuous enough to follow him. I am delighted that Madame du Châtelet has showered her bounties upon Césarion. It will be one reason the more for eſteeming this lady more highly, were that possible.

The wisdom of Solomon would have been well rewarded if the Queen of Sheba had been like the Queen of Cirey. For my part I am neither wise nor a Solomon, yet I think myself greatly honoured by the friendship of one so accomplished as Madame la Marquise. I fear that the sight of her would give birth in me to ideas rather different from what the crowd calls wisdom. I flatter myself that, since you have the satisfaction of knowing this divinity more

closely, you will feel some indulgence for my weakness, if it be a weakness to feel too great an admiration for the maſter-works of nature.

As to friendship, I beg you to believe that I am conſtant, bringing myself with difficulty to give my heart but making such a choice that I need never repent.

XXIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 21st September, 1737

Césarion, knowing my eagerness for all that comes from you, sent me your two letters and kept the remainder of your immortal works to place in my hands himself. If there is anything which could increase my impatience to see him, 'tis the valuable treasure he holds.

Your works shall be preserved as those of Ariſtotle were by Alexander. They shall never leave me; and I shall consider that in them I possess a whole library. 'Tis the honey you have drawn from the faireſt flowers which has loſt nothing by passing through your hands.

As long as you live, Sir, I shall seek truth only at Cirey. I learn more by your doubts than by all that the divine Ariſtotle, the wise Plato and the incomparable Descartes have affirmed so lightly.

Have no fear, Sir, that I should trouble the joys of your philosophical repose. If my hands could cement or ſtrengthen the bonds of your divine union I would

gladly offer their aid. In my own life I have suffered a kind of shipwreck; Heaven preserve me from causing others!

Obviously, the priests will not choose you for their panegyrist. Your reflections on the power of ecclesiastics are perfectly just and supported by the irrevocable testimony of history. Does not their ambition come from the fact that they are forbidden every other vice?

Men have created a bizarre phantom of austerity and virtue; they desire that priests, that half-superstitious, half-impostor race, should adopt this character. They are not allowed openly to enjoy girls and wine, but ambition is not forbidden them. But ambition alone brings with it crimes and dreadful disorders.

I think of Cleopatra's monkey, which was taught to dance admirably; someone threw nuts to it and the monkey, forgetting its clothes, the dance and the part it was playing, rushed for the nuts. A priest plays the virtuous person so long as it suits his interest; but on the least occasion nature soon pierces the cloud; the crimes and malignancies covered by the appearance of virtue then appear openly. It is amazing that ecclesiastical power should be built on such weak foundations.

Your philosophy charms me. There can be no doubt, Sir, but that everything should serve towards men's happiness. What is the use of knowing how long a flea lives, whether the sunbeams pierce deep into the sea and to enquire whether oysters have a soul or not?

Gaiety makes us gods; austerity, devils. Austerity is a kind of avarice which deprives men of the happiness they might enjoy.

Nature by practice becomes more skilful; she formed your brain after all the good models she has made throughout the ages. 'Tis to be feared she will rest content with having created this masterpiece. Be certain, Sir, that your days are as dear and as precious to me as my own.

XXIV

From Voltaire

October, 1737

Monseigneur,

It is sad that Cirey is so far from the throne of Rheinsberg. Your gifts and your orders are long on the road. On the 10th of October I receive your letter of the 16th of August filled with verse and excellent morals, and noble sentiments and a kindness which enchants my heart. Ah! Monseigneur, why are you a prince? Why are you not at least for a year or two a man like others? We should have the happiness of seeing you, and it is the only one I lack since you are graciously pleased to write to me. You are like the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob; you communicate with the faithful by the ministry of angels. You sent us the angel Césarion, and he returned back to Heaven too soon; we saw you in your ambassador. To see you face to face is a happiness not granted us; it is reserved for the elect of Rheinsberg.

Our little paradise of Cirey presents its most humble respects to your Empyrean and the Goddess Émilie bows down before Gott-Frederick.

I cannot make an end of the thanks I owe your Royal Highness. My health is still languid; but if I desire to live, 'tis to witness what you will do. I wish Lucretius may be in error and that my soul is immortal so that I can hear the praises of you either above or below, I know not which; but surely if I then have ears, they will hear it said that you have fulfilled the device of our little firework display at Cirey: *Spes humani generis.*

XXV

From Voltaire

Cirey, October, 1737

Monseigneur,

I have received the last letter with which your Royal Highness honours me, dated the 21st September. I am anxious to know if my last parcel to you and that destined for M. Keyserlingk have reached their address; they were sent off at the beginning of August.

You command me, Monseigneur, to give you some account of my metaphysical doubts; I am taking the liberty of sending you an extract from a chapter On Liberty. Your Royal Highness will at least find good faith in it though you may find ignorance. Would to God all who are ignorant were at least sincere!

Perhaps humanity, the principal of all my thoughts, has seduced me in this work; perhaps my idea that

there would be neither vice nor virtue, that neither reward nor punishment would be needed, that society especially among philosophers would be an exchange of malignancy and hypocrisy, if man did not possess full and absolute liberty—perhaps, I say, this opinion carries me too far. But if you find errors in my thoughts, forgive them for the sake of the principle which produced them.

As far as I can I always bring back my metaphysics to morality. I have enquired sincerely and with all the attention with which I am capable whether I can attain any notions of the human soul, and I have seen that the fruit of all my searching is ignorance. I find that this thinking, free, active agent is nearly in the same position as God; my reason tells me that God exists, but this very same reason also tells me that I cannot know what He is. Indeed, how can we know what our soul is, we who can form no conception of light when we have the misfortune to be born blind? Therefore I perceive with anguish that everything which has been written about the soul cannot teach us the least truth.

After groping about this soul to guess its kind, my principal object is to try at least to regulate it; 'tis the works of our clock. All Descartes's fine ideas about elasticity do not tell me the nature of these works; I do not know what is the cause of elasticity; yet I wind up my clock and somehow or other it goes.

I examine man. Whatever materials he may be composed of, we must see whether vice and virtue do in fact exist. This is the important point concerning

man, I do not mean concerning a given society living under given laws, but the human race. For you, Monseigneur, who are to reign, for the wood-cutter in your forest, for the Chinese doctor and for the American savage. Locke, the wisest metaphysician I know, seems, by combatting (with reason) innate ideas, to think that there is no universal principle of morality. On this point I dare to combat or rather to elucidate that great man's ideas. I agree with him that there is not really any innate idea; it follows obviously that there is no moral proposition innate in our souls; but because we are not born with beards, does it follow that we inhabitants of this Continent are not born to be bearded at a certain age? We are not born with the strength to walk; but whosoever is born with two feet will one day walk. Thus nobody is born with the idea that he must be just; but God has so arranged men's organs that all at a certain age agree upon this truth.

It seems to me obvious that God meant us to live in society, even as He gave bees the instinct and instruments proper to make honey. Since our society could not exist without the ideas of justice and injustice, He gave us the means of acquiring them. Our different customs, it is true, will never allow us to attach the same idea of justice to the same notions. What is a crime in Europe will be a virtue in Asia, just as certain German stews will never please the epicures of France; but God has so constructed Germans and Frenchmen that they all enjoy good cheer. All societies therefore will not have the same laws, but no society will be

without laws. Here then the good of society is established by all men from Pekin to Ireland as the immutable rule of virtue; what is useful to society is therefore good in all countries. This single idea at once conciliates all the contradictions which appear in the morality of men. Theft was permitted in Sparta; but why? Because property was there held in common and because to steal from a miser who kept for himself alone what the law gave the public was serving society.

It is said there are savages who eat men and think they do right. I reply that these savages have the same idea of justice and injustice as we have. They make war as we do from madness and passion; we see the same crimes committed everywhere, and eating one's enemies is but an additional ceremony. The wrong is not putting them on the spit but killing them, and I dare to assert that no savage thinks he acts well when he murders his friend. I saw four savages from Louisiana who were brought to France in 1723. Among them was a woman of a very gentle character. I asked through the interpreter if she had ever eaten the flesh of her enemies and if she liked it; she answered: Yes; I then asked if she would willingly have killed or have caused to be killed any of her compatriots in order to eat them; she replied with a shudder and with a visible horror for this crime. I defy the most determined liar among travellers to dare to assert that there is a tribe, a family, where it is permitted to break one's word. I am justified in believing that since God created certain animals to

feed in common, others to see each other only in pairs very seldom, spiders to make webs, every species possesses the instruments necessary for the work it has to do. Man has been given everything needed to live in society; just as he has been given a stomach to digest, eyes to see, a soul to judge.

Place two men on the earth; they will only call that good, virtuous and just, which is good for both of them. Place four, and there will be nothing virtuous except what is suitable to all four; and if one of the four eats another's supper, or beats or kills him, he will assuredly arouse the others. What I say of these four men must be said of the whole universe. That, Monseigneur, is roughly the plan on which I have written this moral metaphysics; but should I speak of virtue in your presence?

Judge my ideas, great prince, for your soul is the tribunal whence my judgments spring. How much your Royal Highness gives me the desire of living to see one day the Solomon of the North with my own eyes! But I am afraid I shall not be so fortunate as the good old Simeon.

I have no terms in which to thank your Royal Highness for all your favours. With what generosity, I nearly said with what tenderness, you are graciously pleased to interest yourself in me! You write to me what Horace said to Maecenas and you are both Maecenas and Horace. Madame la Marquise du Châtelet, who shares my admiration for your person, and to whom you have given permission to add her respects to mine, takes this liberty.

XXVI

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 19th November, 1737

Sir,

I was not the last to observe the lapse in our correspondence. Nearly two months had passed without my receiving any news of you when I sent off a large parcel to Cirey about a week ago. My friendship for you caused me to be seriously alarmed. I imagined that your indisposition forbade you to answer me or, sometimes I even feared that your temperament had yielded to the violence and persistence of your illness. In short, I was in the state of a miser who believes his hoards are in obvious danger. Your letter came under these circumstances; not only does it dissipate my fears but makes me feel all the pleasure which can result from an intercourse such as yours.

Correspondence is trafficking in thoughts; but in our traffic I have the advantage that you give me wit and truths in return. Who could be so brutal or so apathetic as not to delight in such an intercourse? Indeed, Sir, when once you are known, 'tis impossible to do without you, and your letters have become one of the necessities of my life. Your ideas serve to feed my mind.

How much a contemplative life differs from those which are only a continual fabric of actions! A man concerned only with thinking may think well and express himself ill; but though a man of action should

express himself with all imaginable graces, he must on no account act weakly. King Charles II of England was reproached with this weakness. It was said of this prince that he never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one.

It often happens that those who most declaim against the actions of others do worse themselves when they find themselves in the same circumstances. I have reason to fear that this may one day happen to me, since it is easier to criticise than to act, to give precepts than to carry them out.

The flattering idea you have of me must be founded on those given you by my dear Césarion. I am indeed fortunate to possess such a friend. But let me undeceive you and give you my character in a few words, to correct your mistaken estimate; on condition however that you do not accuse me of the fault of your deceased friend Chaulieu, who always talked about *himself*. You may rely on what I am about to tell you.

I have little merit and little knowledge; but I have a great deal of good will and an inexhaustible fund of esteem and friendship for persons of distinguished virtue; moreover I am capable of all the constancy demanded by true friendship. I have sufficient judgment to do you the justice you deserve; but not sufficient to prevent myself from writing bad verses. *La Henriade* and your magnificent poems prompted me to attempt something similar; but my design was a failure and 'tis but just that I should receive correction from him whose example seduced me.

If it is not abusing your friendship and stealing from you those moments you employ so usefully in the public good, may I beg you to give me a few rules to distinguish words suitable to prose from those which belong to poetry? Despréaux does not touch on this subject in his *Art Poétique*, and I do not know any other author who has treated it. You, Sir, more than any one can instruct me in an art of which you are the honour and of which you might be called the father.

The example of the incomparable Émilie animates and encourages me to study. I implore the help of the two divinities of Cirey to aid me to overcome the difficulties in my path. You are my Lares and my tutelary gods who preside over my Lyceum and my Academy.

La sublime Émilie et le divin Voltaire
Sont de ces présents précieux
Qu'en mille ans, une fois ou deux,
Daignent faire les cieux pour honorer la terre.[1]

Only Césarion could have given you my musical compositions. I greatly fear that French ears have never been soothed by Italian sounds, and that an art which moves the senses cannot please those who find so many charms in the pleasures of the intellect. Yet if my music should have your approbation, I would gladly undertake to tickle your ears, provided you continue to instruct me.

I beg you to give my salutations to the divine

[1] The sublime Émilie and the divine Voltaire are among those precious gifts with which Heaven deigns to honour the world once or twice in a thousand years.

Émilie and to assure her of my admiration. If it is estimable in men to trample prejudices and errors under foot, it is still more so in women, because they have further to go and because they must destroy more than we must before beginning to build. How much the Marquise du Châtelet is to be honoured for preferring the love of truth to the illusions of the senses, to abandon the false and transitory pleasures of this world in order to give herself up entirely to the quest of the most sublime philosophy!

M. Wolff could not be more politely refuted than in your manner. You do justice to that great man and at the same time you point out the weak parts of his system; but to have one side less fortified than the others is a defect common to every system. The works of men will always show the influence of human nature; perfect productions must not be expected from their mind. In vain do philosophers combat error; this hydra is not to be slain; new heads spring up as fast as the others are cut down. In short, we should consider that the best system which contains the fewest contradictions, the fewest irrelevances, and the least obvious absurdities.

We cannot with justice exact a precise map of their empire from the metaphysicians. It would be hard to describe a country we have never seen, from which we have no news, and which is inaccessible. So these gentlemen do the best they can. They present us with their romances arranged in the most gemetricoal order they can imagine; and their reasonings, like spiders' webs, are of almost imperceptible subtlety.

If Descartes, Locke, Newton, Wolff have been unable to guess the enigma, 'tis to be thought, and might even be asserted, that posterity will be no luckier in its quests than ourselves.

XXVII

From Voltaire

Cirey, 20th December, 1737

You do not weary, Monseigneur, of enriching Cirey with your presents. Madame du Châtelet's ears are of all countries, like your mind and hers. She is very well acquainted with Italian music; but she does not in general like the music of princes. The late Duc d'Orléans wrote a detestable opera called Panthée. But, Monseigneur, for us you are neither a prince nor a king; you are a great man.

We are told that your Royal Highness has sent charming verses to Madame de La Popelinière. Do you know, Monseigneur, that you are adored in France? You are looked upon as the young Solomon of the North. 'Tis a pity you were not born to reign elsewhere. An income of at least a million, a pleasant palace in a mild climate, friends instead of subjects, a life surrounded by arts and pleasures, the respect and admiration of men gained by oneself alone, would perhaps be worth a kingdom; but your duty is one day to make the Prussians happy. Ah! How much they are to be envied!

You command me, Monseigneur, to place before

you a few rules for distinguishing those words in the French language which are suitable for prose from those which are consecrated to poetry. 'Tis to be wished that there were rules, but we scarcely have any in our language. It appears to me that languages grow like laws. Fresh needs, which are only gradually perceived, give birth to many laws which seem to contradict each other. It seems that men have wilfully contradicted themselves and talked at random. However, to bring this matter into some order, I will distinguish between poetic ideas, poetic terms and poetic words.

A poetical idea, as your Royal Highness knows, is a brilliant image substituted for the idea natural to the thing of which we wish to speak.

A poetic turn is an inversion which prose does not allow.

The words solely reserved for poetry, I mean noble poetry, are few; for example, in prose we should not say "coursers" for horses; "diadem" for crown; "empire of France" for kingdom of France; "chariot" for carriage; "exploits" for actions; "the Empyrean" for the sky; "gales" for the air, etc.

In the familiar style almost the same terms are used in prose and verse. But I dare to say that I disapprove of the liberty frequently taken when not only different styles but even different languages are mingled in a work which should be of uniform style, like an epistle or a satire; for example the style of Marot and that of our own day. This medley is as displeasing to me

as a picture in which Callot's figures and Teniers' grotesques should be mingled with Raphael's figures. In my opinion this mixture harms the language and only leads foreigners into error.

However, Monseigneur, practice and the reading of good authors have taught your Royal Highness more than my reflections could tell you.

XXVIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Berlin, 25th December, 1737

Sir,

I have received your chapter of metaphysics on Liberty and I am grieved to say that I am not wholly of your opinion. My system is founded on the idea that we should not voluntarily renounce the knowledge we can acquire by Reason. Granted this, I direct my efforts towards knowing all I possibly can of God and, in this, analogy is of no little service to me. I see first of all that a creating Being must be wise and powerful. Since He is wise He willed the plan of the universe in His eternal intelligence and since He is all-powerful He carried it out.

From that it necessarily follows that the Author of this universe must have had an object in creating it. If He had an object, all events must contribute towards it. If all events contribute towards it, all men must act in conformity with the Creator's designs and their actions can only be determined by them according

to the immutable laws of these designs, which they obey without knowing them; otherwise, God would be an idle spectator of nature, the world would be governed according to men's caprice, and He whose power formed the universe would have become useless since it was peopled by weak mortals. I confess to you that since we must make either the Creator or the created a passive being I decide in favour of God. It is more natural that God should do everything and that man should be the instrument of His will than to imagine a God who creates a world, peoples it with men, and then remains with folded arms subjecting His will and His power to the whimsies of the human mind. Suppose an American or some other savage sees a watch for the first time; he will think the hand which marks the hours has the liberty of moving by itself and he will not even suspect that it is moved by hidden works; still less will he suspect that the watch-maker designed it to accomplish precisely that movement. God is this watch-maker. The works with which He has composed us are infinitely finer, more subtle and more varied than those of the watch. Man is capable of many things; and, since the art is more hidden in us, and since the principle which moves us is invisible, we concentrate upon that which strikes our senses most, and that which causes all these works to move escapes our weak eyes; but none the less it was His intention to destine us precisely to what we are; He has none the less willed that all our actions should relate to a whole, which is the support of society and the good of the whole human race.

When we examine these objects separately it may happen that we conceive ideas of them very different from those we should conceive if we considered them with all that is related to them. We cannot judge a building by one of its mouldings; but when we consider all the rest of the building we can form a clear and precise idea of its proportions and beauties. Similarly with philosophical systems. As soon as we take detached pieces we build a tower without foundation and consequently it collapses of itself. Thus, when we confess there is a God, this God must necessarily be part of the system, otherwise it would be better to deny Him altogether. The name of God without the idea of His attributes and especially without the idea of His power, His wisdom and His foresight, is a sound with no significance and relates to nothing whatever.

If I may so put it I confess that we must pile up what is most noble, most elevated and most majestic in order to conceive, however imperfectly, what constitutes this creating Being, this eternal Being, this all-powerful Being, etc. Yet I would rather lose myself in His immensity than renounce knowing Him and every intellectual idea I can form of Him.

In a word if there were no God I should adopt your system; but since it is certain there is a God we cannot lay too much to His account. After which it remains for me to say that since everything is founded on, or rather has its reason in, what went before it, I find the reason for each man's temperament and humour in

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the mechanism of his body. An impatient man has an easily moved bile; a misanthrope has a swollen hypochondre; the drunkard has a dry lung; the amorous a robuſt temperament, etc. In short, since I find all these things disposed in this manner in our bodies I conjecture that each individual muſt neceſsarily be determined in a precise manner; and that it is beyond our power to be of a character different from what we are. What shall I say of events which serve to give us ideas and to inspire us with resolutions, as for example, the fine weather invites me to take the air, the reputation of a man of taſte who recommends me a book causes me to read it? And so on. If I had never been told there was a Voltaire in the world, if I had never read his excellent works, how could my will, that free agent, have determined me to give him all my eſteem? In a word, how could I will a thing if I did not know it?

Now, to attack Liberty in its laſt fortresses, how can a man determine a choice or an action if events do not furnish him with the occasion? And what is it that directs these events? It cannot be chance, because chance is a word without meaning. Therefore it can only be God. Therefore if God directs events according to His will He necessarily directs and governs men; and this principle is the basis and foundation of divine Providence which gives me the higheſt, the moſt noble and the moſt magnificent idea that a creature so limited as man can form of a Being so immense as the Creator. This principle makes me recognise in God an infinitely wise and great Being,

neither absorbed in the greatest things nor degraded in the smallest details. What immensity is that of a God who embraces all things generally and whose wisdom from the beginning of the world prepared that which He will execute at the end of time! I do not pretend to measure the mysteries of God by the weakness of human conception; I carry my gaze as far as I can; but if some objects escape me I do not mean to renounce those which my eyes permit me to perceive clearly.

When you speak of virtue, 'tis plain you are in a country you know; you speak of this subject as a master, for you know its theory and its practice; in a word, 'tis easy for you to discourse learnedly of yourself. Certainly, virtues only exist relatively to society. The first principle of virtue is self-interest (do not let this frighten you), for it is evident that without the intervention of virtues men would destroy each other. Nature naturally produces thieves, the envious, forgers, murderers; they cover the face of the earth; and without the laws which repress vice each individual would abandon himself to the instinct of nature and would think only of himself. To unite all these private interests it was necessary to find a compromise to satisfy them all; and it was agreed that we would not steal each other's property, that we would not attempt each other's lives and that we would mutually lend ourselves to everything which might contribute to the common good.

There are happy mortals, happily born souls, who love virtue for its own sake; their hearts feel the

pleasure of doing good. It matters little to you to know that the interest or the good of society demands hat you shall be happy. The Creator has so happily formed you that your heart is not accessible to vices; and the Creator makes use of you as an instrument, as a minister, to make virtue more respectable and more amiable to the human race. You have devoted your pen to virtue, and we must confess 'tis the greatest present ever made it. The temples which the Romans consecrated to virtue under different titles served to honour it, but you make it disciples. You labour to form subjects for virtue and by your life you give an example of what is most praiseworthy in the human race.

XXIX

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Berlin, 14th January, 1738

Sir,

You show me the greatest civility in the world. I received a parcel addressed to me; I recognised the seals, I opened it and found *Mérope*. I read it, I was charmed, I admired it and am forced to increase my gratitude to you although I did not think it could be increased. *Mérope* is one of the finest tragedies ever written; the economy of the piece is conducted with skill; the terror grows from scene to scene; and I was charmed to find maternal tenderness substituted for sugary love. I confess that the voice of nature seems to me infinitely more pathetic than that of a frivolous

passion. The verses are filled with nobility, the sentiments brought out with dignity; in short, the conduct of the piece, the expression of the morals, the probability, the finale, all are as happily designed as could be wished. You are the only person in the world who could write a play as perfect as *Mérope*. I am charmed, I am in ecstasy, and I only make an end to spare your modesty.

If I cannot pay you in the same money, I am unwilling not to show my gratitude. I beg you to keep the ring I send you as a monument of the pleasure given me by your incomparable tragedy. If you had only written *Mérope* that play alone would be sufficient to carry your name to the most distant centuries. Your works suffice for the immortality of twenty great men not one of whom would lack glory.

You have greatly obliged me by your attentions to me on every possible occasion. I am always in arrears with you and I am impatient that I cannot show you the whole extent of the feelings of esteem with which I am your most faithful and affectionate friend.

XXX

From Voltaire

22nd January, 1738

Monseigneur,

Your Royal Highness should have received an answer from Madame du Châtelet through M. Plötz; but since M. Plötz has not acknowledged receipt of

this letter nor of a fairly large parcel I sent him a week earlier for your Royal Highness, I am now writing by way of M. Thiériot.

I informed you, Monseigneur, that at the first glance my preference went to the *Epistle on Solitude*, that amiable description of the busy leisure you enjoy; but I fear to-day that I may retract. I find no fault of language in the *Epistle to Pesne*, and it all breathes good taste. 'Tis the painter of reason writing to an ordinary painter. I can assure you, Monseigneur, that the six last verses are a masterpiece. They are such as Despréaux would have written. You will take that for flattery. You are very apt, Monseigneur, to ignore your true worth.

The *Epistle to M. Duhan* is worthy of you; 'tis the work of a sublime mind and a grateful heart. M. Duhan apparently was your Royal Highness's tutor. He is very fortunate and never did a prince give such a reward. In reading all you have been graciously pleased to send me I perceive there is not a single false thought. From time to time I see little defects of language impossible to avoid. A real mind does well everything it attempts. You deign to amuse yourself by composing French verses and Italian music; you seize true taste in both. You understand painting exceedingly well; in short, taste for the true leads you in everything. It is impossible but that this great quality, which is the basis of your character, should make the happiness of a nation after making your own. You will be on the throne what you are in your solitude; and you will reign as you think and

write. If your Royal Highness ever departs slightly from the truth, 'tis in the praise with which you overwhelm me; and this error is only the result of your kindness.

The epistle you are graciously pleased to address to me, Monseigneur, is a beautiful justification of poetry and a great encouragement to me. It is not certain that Moses is the author of two fine canticles, nor that the murderer of Uriah, Bathsheba's lover, the King who betrayed the Philistines and the Israelites, etc., composed the Psalms; but it is certain that the heir to the monarchy of Prussia writes very fine French verses.

XXXI

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 1st February, 1738

Sir,

You cannot realise how much my self-esteem is lowered by your verses; nothing can bear comparison with them.

I am in the same condition as the Spaniards of Mexico who are singularly vain of the beauty of their tanned skins and olive complexions. How would they feel if they saw a European beauty, a brilliant complexion in its fairest colours, a skin whose delicacy is like that of the transparent glazes which cover paintings, and allow us to see the strokes of the most subtle pencil? Their pride, I think, would be undermined at its base; and I am much deceived if the

mirrors of these ridiculous Narcissuses would not be broken with shame and rage.

Few persons are indifferent to their reputation; however wicked they may be, they do not wish to be taken for such; and they would like to be cited as examples of virtue and probity and men of heroism. I think that under these circumstances, the reading of history and the monuments it leaves us of the evil reputation of those monsters nature has created cannot but have an advantageous effect on the mind of princes who read them; for, when they see vices as actions which degrade and tarnish reputation, the pleasure of doing good must appear so pure that it is impossible not to be moved by it. An ambitious man does not seek in history the example of an ambitious man who was detested; but whoever reads the tragic end of Cæsar will learn to dread the results of tyranny. Moreover, men hide the darkness and malice of their hearts as much as they can. They act independently of examples and have no other end but the gratification of their undisciplined passions. Moreover, if a wicked man wishes to excuse his crimes by examples he does not need (be it said to the honour of our age) to go back to the origin of the world in order to find them; the corrupt human race presents them every day and thereby has the more influence. In short one has only to be a man to be able to judge of the wickedness of men in all centuries. It is not surprising that these reflections did not occur to you.

My impatience is not yet satisfied by the arrival of Césarion and the *Age of Louis the Great*. They are

delayed on the way by gout. In truth, one must learn to live without the pleasures of life, although I hope I shall not have to wait long and that this Jason will soon make me the possessor of the Golden Fleece I have so long wanted so much.

XXXII

From Voltaire

5th February, 1738

Prince, cet anneau magnifique
Est plus cher à mon coeur qu'il ne brille à mes yeux.
L'anneau de Charlemagne et celui d'Angélique
Étaient des dons moins précieux ;
Et celui d'Hans Carvel, s'il faut que je m'explique,
Est le seul que j'aimasse mieux.[1]

Your Royal Highness embarrasses me with your kindness; I shall soon have another tragedy to send you, and though it is honourable to receive presents from your hand I should prefer that if possible this new tragedy might pay for the ring instead of appearing to ask for another.

Pardon my poetic insolence, Monseigneur, but how could my courage fail to be a little inflated? You give me your approval; that, Monseigneur, is the

[1] Prince, this magnificent ring is more dear to my heart than dazzling to my eyes. The rings of Charlemagne and Angelica were less precious gifts; and to put it plainly, Hans Carvel's ring is the only one I should prefer.

most flattering reward; and I am so well pleased with this reward that I do not think I would have any other for my *Mérope*. Your Royal Highness stands me in lieu of the public. 'Tis enough for me that your masculine mind, so worthy of your rank, should have approved a French play which has no love-scenes. I will not honour our pit and boxes by setting before them a work which condemns this depraved and effeminate taste introduced among us. I dare to think, following your Royal Highness's feelings, that every man whose taste is not ruined by the amorous elegies we call tragedies, will be moved by the maternal love in *Mérope*. Unfortunately, our Frenchmen are so gallant and so pretty that all who have treated such subjects have always decked them with a little intrigue between a young princess and some amiable gentleman. There is a brace of couples set up in the *Électre* of Crébillon, a play which is otherwise a most pathetic tragedy. Lagrange's *Amasis*, which is the same subject as *Mérope*, is enlivened by a very pretty love affair. In short that is our ruling taste; and Corneille always submitted to it. Does Cæsar go to Egypt, 'tis to see an "adorable queen"; and Anthony answers: "Yes, my lord, I have seen her, and she is incomparable". Old Martian, wrinkled Sertorius, Saint Pauline, Saint Theodora the prostitute, are all lovers.

Love may indeed be a passion worthy of the stage; but it must be tragical, passionate, vile, cruel, and criminal, horrible, if you will, but never gallant.

XXXIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 27th February, 1738

It seems, Sir, that the arts and sciences serve you by the quarter. This quarter appears to be that of poetry. What! You have already begun a new tragedy! Where do you find time? Or do verses flow from you as easily as prose? As many problems as questions!

Mérope shall not leave my hands. It is too flattering to my self-esteem to be the sole possessor of a play at which you have worked. I prefer it to all the plays which have appeared in France, except the *Mort de César*.

Love intrigues seem to me especially apt for comedies; they are, so to speak, the essence of comedy; they make the plot of the play, and since it must finish somehow, marriage seems the fittest end. As to tragedy, I should say that some subjects naturally demand love, such as *Titus et Bérénice*, *Le Cid*, *Phèdre*, *Hippolyte*. The only inconvenience is that one love affair is too like another and that when one has seen twenty plays the mind grows weary of a continual repetition of soft sentiments, which are too far removed from the manners of our age. Since a certain amount of ridicule has with reason been attached to romantic love, we no longer feel the pathos of extravagant tenderness. We endure the sighing lover in the first act

and feel inclined to laugh at his simplicity in the fourth or fifth; the passion which animates *Mérope*, on the contrary, is a natural sentiment whose voice is known to every honeſt heart.

XXXIV

From Voltaire

Cirey, 8th March, 1738

Monseigneur,

Since you are graciously pleased to amuse your leisure with verses, here is the third *Epiſtle on Happiness* which I take the liberty of sending you. The subject of the third *Epiſtle* is envy, a passion which I hope your Royal Highness will inspire in all kings. I send you my verses, Monseigneur, and you honour me with yours. It reminds me of that perpetual intercourse which Hesiod says the earth keeps up with Heaven; she sends up vapours and the gods return dew. Thanks indeed for your dew, Monseigneur; but my poor earth will soon lie fallow. I am undermined by diseases and they will soon make my field barren; but my laſt harveſts shall be for you.

Nevertheless, I have written two new acts in bed, to take the place of the laſt two in *Mérope* which seem to me too languid. When your Royal Highness desires to see the fruit of your advice in these new acts, I shall have the honour to send them to you. I greatly desire to write a tragedy which is not enlivened by a love intrigue and yet is worth reading; I shall

thereby do some service to the French ſtage which is certainly too gallant.

Will your Royal Highness allow me to say that the gods of Cicero and the God of Newton and Clarke are not of the same kind; Cicero's god might be called a god reasoning in a café about the operations in the next campaigne; for he who has no prescience has only conjectures; and he who has only conjectures is liable to say as many ſtupidities as the *London Journal* or the *Gazette de Holland;* but that does not fit Sir Isaac Newton and Samuel Clarke, two heads as philosophic as Marcus Tullius was a prattler.

Dr. Clarke, who has profoundly inveſtigated these matters whereof Newton speaks only casually, says, I think with reason, that we can only raise ourselves to the imperfect knowledge of divine attributes as we raise a given number to infinity, going from the known to the unknown.

Each manner of perception, limited and finite in man, is infinite in God. Man's intelligence sees one object at a time and God includes all objects. From our knowledge of a man's character our soul foresees what that man will do on a given occasion; and God foresees what that man will do by the same knowledge carried to infinity. Thus, what in us is a science of conjecture, and therefore does not destroy liberty, is in God a certain science as little harmful to liberty. I think this way of reasoning is not so ridiculous.

Madame la Marquise du Châtelet admires you so

much that she dares not write to you. I who admire you as much, Monseigneur, am therefore mighty bold to spread myself in these immense prattlings.

XXXV

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Ruppin, 28th March, 1738

Sir,

Work is now in progress on the lives of the Tsarina and the Tsarevitch. I hope soon to send you what I have collected on the subject. In these anecdotes you will find barbarities and cruelties like those we read in the history of the first Cæsars.

Russia is a country into which the arts and sciences had not penetrated. The Tsar (Peter) had no touch of humanity, of magnanimity or of virtue; he had been brought up in the most crass ignorance; he acted only in accordance with the impulses of his undisciplined passion; so true is it that men are naturally inclined to evil and that they are only good in proportion to the extent that education and experience have modified their impetuosity.

I knew the Grand Marshal of the Court of Prussia, Printzen, who was still living in 1724 and who had been ambassador to the Tsar during the reign of the late king. He told me that when he reached Petersburg and asked to deliver his letters of credit, he was taken on to a boat which had not left the ship-yard. Unaccustomed to such audiences he

asked for the Tsar; and found him tying a rope on the top deck. When the Tsar noticed M. de Printzen, he invited him to come up on a rope ladder; and when he excused himself on the ground of his clumsiness, the Tsar slid down the rope like a sailor and joined him.

M. de Printzen's mission being very agreeable to the Tsar, he wished to show special marks of satisfaction. To this end he ordered a sumptuous feast to which M. de Printzen was invited. They drank brandy, as is the Russian habit, and drank it brutally. The Tsar, wishing to give a particular mark of his favour, ordered that twenty soldiers who had been imprisoned in Petersburg should be brought in and, after each toast, this dreadful monster cut off the head of one of these wretches. This unnatural prince, to give M. de Printzen some mark of his esteem, desired to give him, according to his expression, the pleasure of showing his skill with these unhappy men. Imagine the effect of such a proposition on a man of good feeling and of a good heart.

De Printzen, who yielded to none in good feelings, rejected an offer which in any other place would have been considered an insult to his character as an ambassador, but which was a mere civility in that barbarous country. The Tsar was angry at his refusal and could not prevent himself from showing his indignation; for which, however, he made atonement next day.

This is not an invented story; it is so true that it may be found in M. de Printzen's despatches which

are preserved in the archives. I have spoken to several people who were in Petersburg at that time and they confirm the occurrence. It is not a story known to two or three people only, but a notorious fact.

XXXVI

From Voltaire

Cirey, 20th May, 1738

The first thing I have to speak to you about, Monseigneur, is your manner of thinking in regard to Machiavelli. How could you fail to be moved by that virtuous anger you almost feel with me because I praised a wicked man's style? His infernal policy was to be studied by the Borgias, father and son, and all those petty princes who could only rise through crime; a prince like you must detest it. This art, which should be set alongside that of Locuste and Brinvilliers, may have given a passing domination to a few tyrants, just as poison may gain an inheritance; but it never made great or happy men. What does this dreadful policy lead to? The misery of others and oneself. Such truths are the catechism of your noble soul.

I am so touched by these sentiments, which with you are innate ideas, and whose fruit will be the happiness of men, that I have almost forgot to thank your Royal Highness for your kindness in enquiring after

my private ills. But love of the public good should come first, should it not? To so many other benefits, Monseigneur, you add that of consulting doctors on my behalf. There is only one thing more singular than your kindness and that is that the doctors have told the truth. I have long been persuaded that my illness is—if I may compare evil with good—like my attachment to you, the affair of a lifetime.

The consolations I enjoy in my delicious solitude, and in the honour of your letters, are sufficiently strong to enable me to endure even greater pain. I suffer most patiently, and, although my pain is sometimes long and sharp, I am very far from thinking myself unhappy. Not that I am a Stoic; on the contrary I am very much of an Epicurean, because I think pain an evil and pleasure a good. And, when everything is counted and weighed up, I think there are infinitely more enjoyments than bitternesses in this life.

XXXVII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

June, 1738

To speak with my ordinary frankness, I must confess that anything regarding the Man-God displeases me in the mouth of a philosopher, of a man who should be above popular errors. Leave to the great Corneille, fallen into dotage and second child-

hood, the insipid task of rhyming the Imitation of Jesus Christ, and draw from your own stock what you have to tell us. We may speak of fables, but only as fables; and I think it better to keep a profound silence with regard to the Christian fables, which are canonised by their antiquity and the credulity of absurd and insipid people.

Only in the theatre would I allow a representation of any fragment of the story of this pretended Saviour; but it seems to me that in your fifth *Epistle* you have been brought to speak in this tone by an excess of complaisance for the Jesuits and the shavelings.

You see, Sir, I am sincere. I may be deceived, but I cannot disguise my feelings.

XXXVIII

From Voltaire

June, 1738

I swear to your Royal Highness that as soon as you have re-taken possession of the Château de Cirey there will no longer be any question of the Capucinad you reproach me with so heroically. But, Monseigneur, Socrates sometimes sacrificed with the Greeks; 'tis true, this did not save him but it might save the little Socratics of to-day.

Once upon a time a fine young lion came boldly up to an ass who was laden and beaten by his master. Said the lion to the ass: "Are you not ashamed to

let him put those two sacks on your back?" "Monseigneur," replied the ass, "when I have the honour to be a lion, my master shall carry the sacks."

Your Royal Highness has doubtless read the excellent book by M. de Maupertuis. A man like him would found in Berlin an Academy of Sciences far superior to that of Paris.

XXXIX

Wesel, 24th July, 1738

My dear friend,

I am nearly sixty leagues nearer Cirey. There seems to be but a step more and I should be there, and I know not what invincible power prevents me from satisfying my eagerness to see you. You cannot conceive what I suffer at being in your neighbourhood. I am impatient, I am uneasy, I feel all the tyrannies of absence.

Bring your meridian nearer to ours; let us move Rheinsberg and Cirey together. I greatly wish M. de Maupertuis would do me this service. I should be far more grateful for it than for his discoveries about the shape of the earth and all he has learned from the Laplanders.

A propos travelling, I have just passed through a country where nature has spared nothing to create the most fertile estates and the most cheerful lands imaginable; but she seems to have exhausted herself in making trees, hedges and streams to embellish the

country-side, for she certainly has been unable to perfect our own species here.

I talk of your reputation with all who come here from Holland and I either find people who think as I do or I make proselytes. I fought for you at Brunswick against a certain Bothmer, an agile scatter-brain and an unsuccessful wit who gives decisive judgments about everything. My cause triumphed as you may imagine; and, confounded by the power of your deserts, he admitted himself beaten.

The infamous libels with which your countrymen are pleased to deck you, are partly the causes of these prejudices in the public which is usually an unjust and ignorant judge. It is enough that a man should be blamed by someone who writes against him, for three quarters of the world to repeat endlessly the accusations of a rival. The mob never examines anything and loves to repeat all that others have said against a famous man.

Your nation is ungrateful and frivolous to allow scandalmongers and unknown pens to attempt to wither your laurels. Are great men so common? Is it because you do not swing the censor in the face of the gods of this world? They can only bring bad arguments to their support. If Augustus had allowed Virgil to be covered with opprobrium, if Louis XIV had allowed the merit of Despréaux to be disparaged, they would not have been such great princes and the Roman and French monarchs would perhaps have been obliged to renounce part of their reputation.

To obscure genius and great talents or to allow them to be stifled is a species of barbarity. By not sufficiently esteeming you, the French appear to think themselves unworthy of being the countrymen of the author of *La Henriade* and so many other masterpieces. With a little attention anyone can see that the pens of your enemies are dipped in the gall of envy. They do not bring reasons against you but shafts of malice and hatred; so true is it that jealousy and envy are a mist which hides the merit of his adversary from the jealous man's eyes.

XL

From Voltaire

Cirey, 18th October, 1738

I observe with a satisfaction approaching pride, Monseigneur, that the little oppositions I endure in my own country arouse indignation in your Royal Highness's great heart. You cannot doubt but that your approval amply rewards me for all these annoyances; they are common to all who have cultivated the sciences and those men of letters who have most loved the truth have always been the most persecuted.

Calumny attempted the death of Descartes and Bayle; Racine and Boileau would have died of grief had they not found a protector in Louis XIV. We still possess verses made against Virgil. I am far

indeed from being able to compare myself with those great men; but I am more fortunate than they; I enjoy repose, I have a fortune sufficient for a private man and greater than a philosopher needs, I live in a delicious solitude beside a moſt eſtimable woman whose society ever provides me with new lessons. And then, Monseigneur, you are graciously pleased to love me; the moſt virtuous, the moſt amiable prince in Europe deigns to open his heart to me, to confide to me his works and his thoughts and to correct mine. What more do I need? Health alone fails me; but there is not a sick man in the world happier than I.

XLI

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Berlin, 25th December, 1738

My dear friend,

A few days ago I read with much pleasure the letter you sent your faithless publishers in Holland. My interest in your reputation causes me to share eagerly in the approbation which the public cannot fail to give your moderation.

This moderation should be the character proper to every man who cultivates the sciences; philosophy, which enlightens the mind, increases our knowledge of the human heart; and its moſt solid fruit should be a humane tolerance for the weaknesses, faults and vices of men. 'Tis to be wished that your moderation were imitated by the learned in their disputes, by

theologians in their quarrels, and by princes in their differences. Knowledge, true religion, a claim to the respect of men, should elevate those who possess them far above certain passions which should be left to base minds. Moreover recognised merit is defended from the shafts of envy as if it were in a fort. Every blow against an inferior enemy is a dishonour to him who deals it.

The art of returning insult for insult belongs to street-porters. Even if these insults were truths, even if they were warmed by the fire of poetry, they would still remain what they are. They are arms well placed in the hands of those who fight with sticks but are unsuitable to those who can use the sword.

Your merit raises you so far above satire and the envious, that you certainly have no need to repel their attacks. Their malice lasts but for a time and then falls with them into eternal oblivion.

History has preserved the memory of Aristides but has not been pleased to remember the names of those who envied him. We know as little about Ovid's persecutors.

Vengeance is the passion of every offended man; but generosity is the passion of fine minds alone. And it is yours; assuredly it caused you to write that fine letter which I cannot sufficiently admire.

I am delighted that the world should be obliged to confess that your philosophy is as sublime in practice as it is in theory.

XLII

From Voltaire

Cirey, 18th January, 1739

Your Royal Highness advises me, that is to say, orders me to complete the history of the *Age of Louis XIV*. I shall obey, and I shall even try to elucidate it with deference, so as to take nothing from the truth and yet not to render it odious. After all, my chief object is not political and military history; it is the history of the arts, of commerce, of civilisation, in a word, of the human mind. In all that there is no dangerous truth. I do not think I need forbid myself a road so great and so certain because there is a little path in which I might stumble; that which is in your Royal Highness's hands will never be seen by anyone but you. The crowd is not to be served as I serve my prince.

I have re-written the *History of Charles XII* from information supplied me by one of King Stanislas's servants and from the information your Royal Highness was graciously pleased to procure me.

I am re-writing *La Henriade* and by the next post I mean to submit to your Royal Highness's judgment several corrections I have just made. I am also correcting all my tragedies; I have written a new act for *Brutus*, for I must labour to be correct and to be worthy of my Prince and Émilie.

I am not printing *Mérope* because I am not yet

content with it; but I am asked to write a new tragedy, a tragedy full of love but not of gallantry, to make the women cry and to be parodied by the Comédie Italienne. I am doing so, I have been working at it for a week; I shall be laughed at; but meanwhile I am carefully revising the *Elements of Newton;* I must forget nothing and I want this work to be fuller and more intelligible.

I have now given you, Monseigneur, an exact account of all the labours of your subject at Cirey; but I must not omit the new persecution directed against me by Rousseau and the Abbé Desfontaines. While I spend in solitude my days and nights in assiduous labour, in Paris I am persecuted, calumniated, outraged in the most cruel manner. Madame la Marquise du Châtelet thought that Thiériot had sent your Royal Highness a dreadful libel by the Abbé Desfontaines; she had the more reason to think so because she had written about it to Thiériot asking him to tell her the truth, and Thiériot did not reply. Immediately Madame du Châtelet's generous heart, a heart worthy of yours, was inflamed; she wrote to your Royal Highness; she made complaints becoming to her mouth but forbidden to mine. Here are the facts:

A man, the Chevalier de Mouhy, who had already written against the Abbé Desfontaines, composed a little literary pamphlet against him; and in this pamphlet he printed a letter I wrote two years ago. In this letter I mentioned a well-known fact, i.e. that the Abbé Desfontaines, saved from the stake by me, had

immediately rewarded me by writing a libel against his benefactor, and that Thiériot was a witness of this. All this is the most exact truth, and a truth very shameful to literature. I do not know whether Thiériot, on this occasion, is afraid of new bites from the Abbé Desfontaines, whether he fears a mad dog more than he loves his friend; I have had no news of him for a long time. I forgive him for not committing himself on my behalf. I have written a little apologetic memoir to reply to the Abbé Desfontaines. Madame du Châtelet sent it to your Royal Highness; since then I have greatly corrected it. I use no insult; the work is not against the Abbé Desfontaines, it is for me; I try to mingle with it a little literature, in order not to weary the public with personal matters.

But I feel that I must weary your Royal Highness with all this chatter. What a subject for a great prince! But the gods sometimes concern themselves with the follies of men, and heroes watch cock-fights.

I am, Monseigneur, with the most profound respect, the most tender, the most inviolable, etc.

XLIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 15th April, 1739

I was greatly touched by the account you give me of your deplorable situation. A friend at the distance of some hundreds of leagues seems rather useless;

but I intend to make a little effort in your favour, which I hope will be of some use to you. Ah! My dear Voltaire, why can I not offer you a shelter where you would not have to suffer such troubles as those brought on you by your ungrateful country!

I wish I could sooth the bitterness of your situation; I assure you I am thinking of means to serve you efficaciously. Console yourself as best you can, my dear friend, and remember that to establish an equality of conditions among men you must undergo reverses able to balance the advantages of your genius, your talents, and the Marquise's friendship.

Moreover your adversaries are such contemptible people, you should not have the least fear that they might tarnish your reputation. The teeth of envy will be blunted every time they try to pierce you. One has only to read without partiality the writings and calumnies directed against you to perceive their malice and their infamy. Calm yourself, my dear Voltaire, and wait until you can enjoy the fruits of my solicitude.

XLIV

From Voltaire

Louvain, 30th May, 1739

Monseigneur,

As I left Brussels I received everything that might flatter my soul and heal my body, and I owe them to your Royal Highness. You wish me to live, Monseigneur; I am so bold as to say that you have

some reason to wish that the most tender of your admirers, the faithful witness of all that happens in your noble mind, should not perish at once. *La Henriade* and I owe our lives to you. I am far more honoured than Virgil was; Augustus wrote verses for him only after the death of his poet, and your Royal Highness gives life to yours and is graciously pleased to honour *La Henriade* with a correction from your hand. Ah! Monseigneur, why must I concern myself with the miserable benevolence of a cardinal whom fortune has rendered powerful? What need have I of other men? Would to God I might remain in the Comte de Loo's hermitage where I am going to meet Émilie! The day before yesterday we reached Brussels. We are now travelling; it will be some days before I begin to enjoy a little leisure; as soon as I have time, I shall set in order something to amuse my protector for a few minutes, while he will be occupied with a noble work, so worthy of a prince such as he is. If you are graciously pleased to write against Machiavelli it will be Apollo crushing the serpent Python. You are certainly my Apollo, Monseigneur, for me you are the god of medicine and poetry; you are also Bacchus, for your Royal Highness deigns to send good wine to Émilie and your sick man. Have the goodness to order, Monseigneur, that this Bacchic gift be forwarded to the address of one of your most worthy favourites. It is M. le duc d'Aremberg; all wine should be addressed to him, as every work owes you homage. There are certain ceremonies concerning wine in Brussels from which he will save us. I hope

I shall drink with him to the health of my dear sovereign, the true master of my soul, whose subject I more really am than that of the king under whom I was born.

XLV

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Königsberg, 9th August, 1739

I am sure that the forty heads who are paid to think and whose occupation is writing, do not work half as much as you. I am certain that if we could estimate the value of thoughts all those of the Academy taken together would not equal yours. These sciences are for everybody, but the art of thinking is the rarest gift in nature.

Among a hundred people who believe they think, there is scarcely one who thinks for himself. Others have only two or three ideas which they turn over and over in their minds without altering them and without acquiring new forms; and the hundredth will think perhaps what another has already thought; but his genius, his imagination, will not be creative. This creative spirit it is which multiplies ideas, grasps the relations between things which the careless man hardly perceives; and this power of good sense in my opinion forms the essential part of the man of genius.

Three different kinds of writing from your pen have reached me in six weeks. I imagine that some-

where in France there is a select society of superior and equal geniuses who all work together and publish their works under the name of Voltaire, as another society publishes theirs under the name of Trévoux. If this supposition is true, I shall become a Trinitarian, and I shall begin to see daylight in this mystery which the Christians have hitherto believed without understanding.

XLVI

From Voltaire

12th August, 1739

In Paris they talk of nothing but fêtes and fireworks; they are spending a lot of money on powder and rockets. They used to spend as much on amenities and the things of the mind; when Louis XIV gave fêtes, Corneille, Molière, Quinault, Lulli, Lebrun were concerned in them. I am sorry that a fête should be only a passing fête, a noise, a crowd, a large number of *bourgeois*, a few diamonds and nothing more; I should like it to pass to posterity. Our masters the Romans understood that better than we; the amphitheatres and triumphal arches erected for a day of solemnity still please and instruct us. But we build a scaffold in the Place de Grève where the night before several thieves have been broken on the wheel; and we fire cannons from the Hôtel de Ville. I wish they would use these cannons to destroy the Hôtel de Ville which is in the vilest taste imaginable, and that the

money spent on rockets should be used to build a handsome one. A prince who builds necessarily causes the other arts to flourish: Painting, sculpture, engraving follow in the steps of architecture. A fine drawing-room is meant for music, another for comedy. In Paris we have neither comedy nor opera-house; and, by a contradiction only too worthy of us, excellent works are played in very ugly theatres. The good plays are in France and the beautiful vessels in Italy.

XLVII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Potsdam, 9th September, 1739

You speak of great men and engagements; one would take you for a recruiting sergeant. Are you also sacrificing to the gods of our country? If Paris is all for pleasures, and is sometimes wrong in its choice, here they are all for "great men"; they measure merit by the yard; and it seems that any one who has the misfortune to be born half a foot shorter than a giant cannot have common sense, and 'tis founded on the rule of proportion. For my part, I know not how it is; but according to what I have been told Alexander was not tall, nor Cæsar. The Prince de Condé, Turenne, Lord Marlborough and Prince Eugène whom I have seen, who were all heros, were less conspicuous physically than from that force of mind which finds resources in itself in dangers, and

with exquisite judgment always turns them promptly to the best advantage.

Yet I like this amiable folly of the French; I admit I like to think that four hundred thousand inhabitants of a large town think only of the charms of life and scarcely know its troubles; 'tis a sign that those four hundred thousand men are happy.

It seems to me that the head of every state should think seriously of pleasing his people if he cannot make them rich; for pleasure can very well exist without the support of great riches. For example a man is at a play, at a fête, in a place where a large assembly of society people give him a certain satisfaction; at such moments, I say, a man is happy, and he goes home with his imagination filled with pleasant objects which he allows to control his mind. Why not then take more pains to supply the public with these pleasant moments which sweeten the bitternesses of life or at any rate distract them for a few moments from their troubles? Pleasure is the most real good in this life; therefore it is doing good to furnish society with a means of amusing itself.

It seems that the whole world has taken a liking for fêtes, for even in the neighbourhood of Nova Zembla and the Hyperborean seas, they talk of nothing but amusements. The news from Petersburg is all of balls, feasts and fêtes for the marriage of the Prince of Brunswick. At Berlin I saw the Prince of Brunswick and the Duke of Lorraine, and I saw them frolic together in a way which scarcely showed the monarch. I do not know what necessity or what

Providence destined those two heads to reign over the greater part of Europe.

If providence were what people say it is, then the Newtons and the Wolffs, the Lockes and the Voltaires, the men who think best, should be masters of the world; it would then appear that the infinite wisdom which presides over all things, had placed in this world the wisest among human beings to govern the others; but as things go, everything appears to go by chance. A man of merit is not esteemed according to his true value; another is not placed in a post which suits him; a knave becomes illustrious and a good man languishes in obscurity; the reins of government of an empire are committed to inexpert hands, and men of experience are kept out of authority. Let people say what they will, they can never show me a good reason for this ridiculous state of destinies.

XLVIII

From Frederick, Prince Royal of Prussia

Berlin, 6th January, 1740

My dear Voltaire,

If I have delayed writing to you it was only because I did not wish to appear with empty hands. I am sending you by this post five chapters of my *Anti-Machiavelli* and an *Ode on Flattery* which I have written in my leisure time. If I had been at Rheinsberg you would long ago have had the very dregs of my work; but in the dissipations of Berlin it is impossible to advance rapidly.

The *Anti-Machiavelli* does not deserve to be announced to the King of France under my name. That Prince possesses so many great and good qualities that my feeble writings would be superfluous to develop them. Moreover I write freely and speak of France as I do of Prussia, of England, of Holland and all the other European powers. It is good that people should not know the name of an author who writes only for truth's sake, and who consequently sets no impediment to his thoughts. When you see the end of the book you will agree with me that it is prudent to bury the name of the author in the discretion of friendship.

I am not self-interested; if I can serve the public I shall work without expecting reward or praise from it, like those unknown members of society who are as obscure as they are useful. After my half year at the Court, will come my half year of study. In a fortnight I expect to embrace that wise and peaceful life which delights you; and then I mean to set the last hand to my work and to render it worthy of the centuries which will elapse after us. I count the trouble as nothing, for one only writes for a time; but I count the work I am doing for a great deal, because it must survive me. Happy those writers who, aided by beautiful imagination and always guided by wisdom, can compose works worthy of immortality! They will do more honour to their age than Phidias, Praxitiles and Zeuxis did to theirs. The industry of the mind is far preferable to the mechanical industry of artists. A single Voltaire will do more honour to France than

a thousand pedants, a thousand false wits, a thousand great men of an inferior order.

The devotees here have raised a fearful ſtorm againſt those they call miscreants. False zeal is a madness common to all countries; and I am convinced that it turns the heads of the moſt reasonable people when once it gets into them. The moſt amusing part of it is that when this dizzy spirit takes hold of a nation, nobody is allowed to remain neutral; everybody is expected to take sides and to enliſt under the banner of fanaticism. For my part, I confess I shall do nothing of the sort, and shall content myself with composing a few psalms to raise a good opinion of my orthodoxy. Waſte a few moments in the same way, my dear Voltaire, and with a holy brush daub the harmony of a few melodious rhymes. Socrates caſt incense to the household gods; Cicero, who was far from credulous, did the same. One muſt give way to the fantaſtic notions of a futile mob to avoid persecution and censure; for after all the moſt desirable thing in this world is to live in peace. Let us commit a few follies with the fools to attain that desirable situation.

XLIX

From Voltaire

Brussels, 26th January, 1740

Monseigneur,

I have received your chapters of the *Anti-Machiavelli* and your *Ode on Flattery* and your letter

in prose and verse which must surely have been dictated to you by the Abbé de Chaulieu or Comte Hamilton. A prince who writes against flattery is something as strange as a pope writing against infallibility. Louis XIV would never have sent such an ode to Despréaux, and I doubt whether Despréaux would have sent it to Louis XIV. The only favour I ask of your Royal Highness is not to take my praise for flattery. With me everything comes from the heart; approbation for your works, thanks for your kindness, somehow escape me—you must forgive me.

I am not altogether exiled, as was announced:

Ce vieux madré de cardinal,
Qui vous escroqua la Lorraine,
N'a point de son pays natal
Exclu ma muse un peu hautaine;
Mais son coeur me veut quelque mal.
J'ai berné la pourpre romaine;
Du théâtre pontifical
J'ai raillé la comique scène;
C'est un crime bien capital,
Qui longue pénitence entraîne.[1]

The fact is, however, nobody has spoken of Rome with more deference; apparently I ought not to have spoken of it at all. In the whole of this persecution there is something so excessively ridiculous and childish that I laugh instead of complaining.

[1] The old fox of a cardinal, who swindled you out of Lorraine, has not exiled my slightly haughty muse from his native land; but he wishes me ill in his heart. I have jested at the Roman purple; I have rallied the comic scene of the pontifical theatre; and this is a serious crime which calls for a long penitence.

L

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Charlottenbourg, 6th June, 1740

My dear friend,

My lot is changed, I have witnessed the last moments of a king, his agony, his death. On coming to the throne, I had no need of that lesson to be disgusted with the vanity of human grandeur.

I projected a little work of metaphysics; it has changed into a political work. I meant to joust with the amiable Voltaire, and I must fence with the old mitred Machiavelli.[1] We are not the masters of our fate, my dear Voltaire. We are borne along by the whirlwind of events and we must allow ourselves to be carried with them. I beg you will see in me nothing but a zealous citizen, a rather sceptical philosopher and a really faithful friend. For God's sake, write to me as a man and, like me, scorn titles, names and all exterior pomp.

Hitherto I have hardly had time to collect myself; I have an infinite number of occupations; I assume others in addition; but in spite of all this work I still have time to admire your work and to seek instruction and recreation from you.

Assure the Marquise of my esteem. I admire her as much as her vast knowledge and the rare capacity of her mind deserves.

Good-bye, my dear Voltaire; if I live, I shall see

[1] Fleury.

you, and see you this year. Continue to love me, and always be sincere with your friend.

LI

From Voltaire

18th June, 1740

Sire,

If your "lot is changed", your noble soul is not; but mine is. I was a little misanthropic and over-distressed by the injustices of men. I now abandon myself to joy with everyone. Thanks be to Heaven your Majesty has already fulfilled nearly all my predictions. Already you are beloved in your own dominions and in Europe. During the last war an envoy from the Emperor said to Cardinal Fleury: "Monseigneur, the French are very amiable but they are all Turks." Your Majesty's envoy could now say: "The French are all Prussians."

Your Majesty orders me when writing to you to think less of the king than of the man. 'Tis an order after my own heart. I know not how to behave with a king, but I am perfectly at ease with a real man, with a man who has the love of the human race in his head and in his heart.

There is one thing I should never dare to ask of the king, but which I dare to take the liberty of asking of the man; it is whether the late king before he died at least recognised and loved all the merit of my adored prince. I know the qualities of the late king were so different from yours that it might be he did

not feel all your various merits; but if he was touched, if he acted with confidence, if he justified those admirable sentiments for him which you were graciously pleased to show me in your letters, I should be glad. One word from your adored hand will satisfy me.

The king perhaps will ask me why I make these questions to the man; he will tell me I am very curious and very bold; do you know what I shall reply to his Majesty? "Sire, I love the man with all my heart."

Your Majesty, or your Humanity, does me the honour to inform me that you are now obliged to prefer politics to metaphysics and to fence with our good Cardinal.

The question has been raised here whether your Majesty will be anointed with the holy oil or not; I cannot see that you need a few drops of oil to make you revered by and dear to your people. I have every reverence for the holy ampullas, especially those sent down from Heaven for people like Clovis; and I am grateful to Samuel for pouring olive oil on Saul's head, since olive trees were very common in their country;

> Mais, seigneur, après tout, quand vous ne seriez point,
> Ce que l'Ecriture appelle *oint*,
> Vous n'en seriez pas moins mon héros et mon maître.
> Le grand coeur, les vertus, les talents, font un roi;
> Et vous seriez sacré pour la terre et pour moi,
> Sans qu'on vît votre front huilé des mains d'un prêtre.[1]

[1] But, Sire, even if you were not what the scriptures call "anointed", you would none the less be my hero and my master. A noble heart, virtues, talents, make a king; and you will be crowned for the earth and for me without having your forehead oiled by a priest's hands.

Since your Majesty, who has made yourself a man, is graciously pleased to honour me with your letters, I dare to beg that you will tell me how you allot your day; I am afraid you will work too hard. Sometimes you may sup without allowing any time to elapse between your work and the meal; then you may rise the next day with indigestion, and work with a head not quite clear; then you over-strain and fall ill; in the name of the human race, to whom you have become necessary, take care of so precious a health.

LII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Charlottenbourg, 27th June, 1740

My dear Voltaire,

Your letters always give me infinite pleasure not from the praise you bestow on me but from the instructive prose and the charming verses they contain. You want me to speak of myself, like "the eternal Abbé de Chaulieu."

Never mind. You must be satisfied.

Here is the Berlin Gazette you asked for.

I arrived at Potsdam on the evening of Friday, and found the king in so distressing a situation that I guessed his end was near. He said a thousand friendly things to me, and talked for a full hour about home and foreign affairs, with all possible clearness of mind and good sense. He talked to me in the same way on Saturday, on Sunday and on Monday, appearing

very tranquil, very resigned, and enduring his suffering with great firmness. He resigned the Regency into my hands at five o'clock on Tuesday morning, took a tender farewell of my brothers, of all the important officers and of me. The queen, my brothers and I were present during his last hours; during his agony, he showed the stoicism of a Cato. He expired with the curiosity of a physician concerning what was happening within him at the very instant of his death and with the heroism of a great man, leaving us all sincere regrets for the loss of him, and the example of his courageous death.

The infinite amount of work which has fallen to my lot since his death scarcely leaves time for my real grief. I feel that since losing my father I owe myself wholly to my country. With this view I have worked to the limit of my capacity to make the promptest arrangements and those most suitable to the public good.

I began by increasing the forces of the state by sixteen battalions, five squadrons of hussars and a squadron of body-guards. I have laid the foundations of our new Academy. I have acquired Wolff, Maupertuis, Vaucanson and Algarotti. I am awaiting replies from s'Gravesande and Euler. I have established a new college for commerce and manufactures; I am engaging painters and sculptors; and I am just leaving for Prussia to receive the homage, etc., without the holy ampulla and without the useless and frivolous ceremonies established by ignorance and superstition and supported by custom.

My way of living is at present rather unregulated, for the doctors have seen fit to order me *ex officio* to take the waters at Pyrmont. I rise at four, I take the waters until eight, I write until ten, I watch the troops until mid-day, I write until five, and in the evening divert myself in good company. When these travels are over my way of living will be quieter and more uniform; but at present I have to follow the ordinary course of affairs, with the new establishments in addition, and therewithal I have to endure many useless compliments and to issue circular orders.

My chief occupation is the establishment of fairly large magazines in all the provinces, so that each shall have enough grain in store for a year and a half.

LIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 2nd August, 1740

My dear Voltaire,

I received three of your letters on a day of annoyance, ceremony and boredom. I am infinitely obliged to you. All I can give you as answer at present is that I leave the *Machiavelli* at your disposal, and I have no doubt that you will act in such a way that I shall have no reason to repent of the confidence I place in you. I rely entirely upon my dear editor.

I shall write to Madame du Châtelet as you desire. To speak frankly about her journey, it is Voltaire, it is you, it is my friend I wish to see; and the divine

Émilie, with all her divinity, is only an accessory, to the Newtonised Apollo.

I cannot tell you whether I shall or shall not be travelling. Know, my dear Voltaire, that the king of Prussia is a political weathercock; and I need the impulse of certain favourable winds to travel or to direct my travels. In short, I am more than ever convinced that a king is a thousand times more unhappy than a private man. I am the slave of the whims of so many other powers, that I can never do what I want with my own person. Well, whatever happens, I hope to see you. May you be joined to my flock for ever!

Good-bye, my dear friend, sublime mind, first born of thinking beings!

LIV

From Voltaire

Brussels, 22nd August, 1740

Sire,

The world has lynx's eyes fixed upon my Solomon.

"Is it true he is going to France?" says one.

"He will see Italy", says another; "and they will elect him Pope to regenerate Rome."

"Will he pass through Brussels?"

There are bets for and against.

"If he comes", says the Princess de La Tour, "he will stay at my house."

"Oh, no! Princess; his Majesty will not stay with

your Serene Highness; and if he comes to Brussels, it will be in ſtrict incognito; he and his amiable suite will stay with Émilie. She has the laſt house in the town, far from the people and the Highnesses of Brussels; and he will be as comfortable there as with you, although this hired house is not so well furnished as yours."

That is what I think. But what does the Princess de La Tour do? She dispatches a messenger poſt-haſte from the country to ask Madame du Châtelet whether his Majeſty is coming; and Madame du Châtelet replies that there is not a word of truth in it and that everything people are saying is a mere tale. Immediately the Princess de La Tour sends messengers to find out the truth of the faſt! Sire, the world is very curious. We have only to insert in the gazettes that your Majeſty is going to Aix-la-Chapelle or to Spa and we shall disconcert all the news-mongers.

However, if it is true that your Humanity is passing through Brussels, I beg you will bring some English drops with you, for I shall swoon with pleasure.

LV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 26th October, 1740

My dear Voltaire,

A moſt unforseen event prevents me from opening my heart to you as usual and from chattering as I should wish. The Emperor is dead.

His death alters all my pacific ideas, and I think that in June it will be rather a matter of cannon-powder, soldiers, and trenches than of actresses, of balls and stages; so that I am obliged to cancel the bargain we were about to make. My affair at Liège is quite finished, but the present affairs are of much more importance to Europe; now is the moment for a complete change in the old political system; 'tis that falling rock striking the idol of four metals seen by Nebuchadnezzar, which destroyed them all. I shall be a thousand times obliged to you for the edition of the completed *Machiavelli*; I cannot work at it at present; I am overwhelmed with business. I must get rid of my fever, for I need my machine and must now make as much use of it as possible.

I send you an ode in reply to Gresset's. Good-bye, my dear friend, do not forget me.

LVI

From Voltaire

Berlin, 28th November, 1740

Sire,

I have just received a letter from your Majesty, sent on to me by M. de Raesfeld.

I am very sorry I did not receive it sooner, it would have consoled me. Your Majesty informs me that you have decided to repudiate both editions and to print a new copy at Berlin, when you have leisure.

That alone suffices for the safety of your fame, in case there should be anything displeasing to your Majesty in the other two editions. The book is so widely admired that your Majesty could only become more admired by correcting what I have done amiss and strengthening what I have weakened. May I be as knavish as a Jesuit, as beggarly as an alchemist, as silly as a monk, if I intended aught but your fame! Sire, I have built you an altar in my heart; I am as sensible of your fame as yourself. I feed on the incense given you by those who know you; I have no self-love except in relation to you.

Read, Sire, this letter I have received from Cardinal Fleury. Thirty private men write me similar letters; all Europe rings with your praise. I can swear to your Majesty that with the exception of the wretched journalist, everybody knows I am incapable of writing such a political work, and everybody perceives the power of your remarkable genius.

But, Sire, however great a genius one may be, one cannot write either in verse or prose without consulting a friend.

Do not be surprised, Sire, at Cardinal Fleury's letter; he always writes to me in a friendly way. If I have been in bad odour with him, it is because I thought I had reason to be discontented with him, and could not bring myself to pay court to him. I am never guided by anything but my heart.

Your Majesty will see by this letter in the original handwriting, that when I sent the *Anti-Machiavelli* to this minister, as to so many others, I was very careful

not to mention your Majesty as the author of this admirable book.

I beg, Sire, that you will judge of my conduct in this affair by the scrupulous care I have had never to give anyone a copy of the verses with which your Majesty has honoured me; I dare to say that in this respect I stand alone.

I leave to-morrow. Madame du Châtelet is very ill. I still flatter myself that I shall be so happy as to assure your Majesty for a moment at Potsdam of the tender attachment, the admiration and respect with which I shall ever be, Sire, your Majesty's most humble and most obedient servant.

LVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Headquarters at Herrendorf in Silesia, 23rd December, 1740

My dear Voltaire,

I have received two letters from you; but I could not answer them sooner; I am like Charles XII's chess king which was always on the move. For the last fortnight we have been continually on the road, in the finest weather imaginable.

I am too tired to answer your charming verses and too cold to enjoy all their charm; but that will return. Do not ask for poetry from a man who is at present following the occupation of a carter, and sometimes of a carter stuck in the mud. Do you want to know my life?

We march from seven o'clock in the morning until

four in the afternoon. I then dine; afterwards I work and receive tedious visits; then comes a swar of insipid business affairs. There are over-scrupulous men to rectify, over-ardent heads to restrain, idle people to urge on, the impatient to make docile, the rapacious to restrain within the limits of equity, babblers to listen to, mutes to converse with; I must drink with those who want to drink, eat with those who are hungry; make myself a Jew to the Jews, a pagan to the pagans.

Such are my occupations, which I would gladly make over to another if that phantom called Glory did not appear to me too often. Indeed, 'tis a great folly, but a folly too difficult to banish when once we dote on it.

Good-bye, my dear Voltaire; may Heaven preserve from misfortune him with whom I should like to sup after having given battle this morning! The swan of Padua[1] is going, I think, to Paris to take advantage of my absence; the philosophical geometer[2] is squaring curves; the literary philosopher[3] is translating Greek and the most learned doctor[4] is doing nothing or perhaps something very like it.

LVIII

From Voltaire

December, 1740

Sire,

I am now like the pilgrims to Mecca who turn their eyes towards that town after they have left it;

[1] Algarotti. [2] Maupertuis. [3] Du Molard. [4] Jordan.

I turn mine towards your Court. My heart, touched by your Majesty's kindness, feels only the distress of not being able to live near you. I take the liberty to send you a new copy of the tragedy of *Mahomet*, the first sketches of which you desired to see long ago. It is a tribute I pay to the amateur of the arts, to the enlightened judge, above all to the philosopher, far more than to the sovereign.

Your Majesty knows with what spirit I was animated in composing this work; my pen was guided by love of the human race and horror of fanaticism, to virtues which are made to stand beside your throne. I have always thought that tragedy should not be a mere spectacle to touch the heart without reforming it. What does the human race care for the passions and misfortunes of a hero of antiquity, if they do not serve to instruct us? It is admitted that the comedy of *Tartuffe*, that masterpiece which no nation has equalled, has done good to men by showing hypocrisy in all its ugliness; may one not attempt to attack in a tragedy that species of imposture which brings into play at once the hypocrisy of some and the fury of others? May we not return to those scoundrels of old, the illustrious founders of superstition and fanaticism, who first took the knife from the altar to make victims of those who refused to be their disciples?

Those who say that the time of these crimes has passed; that we shall never again see a Barcochebas, a Mahomet, a John o' Leiden, etc.; that the flames of religious wars are extinguished; in my opinion do too much honour to human nature. The same poison

ſtill exists though less developed; this peſt, which appeared to be ſtamped out, from time to time produces germs which might infect the whole earth. In our own days have we not seen the prophets of the Cevennes kill in the name of God those of their ſect who were not ſufficiently submissive ?

The action I have painted is atrocious; and I do not know whether horror has ever been carried so far on any ſtage. There is a young man born virtuous, who, seduced by his fanaticism, murders an old man who loves him, and thus with the idea of serving God, unwittingly renders himself guilty of a parricide; there is an impoſtor who orders this murder and promises the assassin an inceſt as his reward. I admit that this is setting horror on the ſtage; and your Majeſty is fully persuaded that a tragedy should not conſiſt solely in a declaration of love, a jealousy and a marriage.

Our hiſtorians themselves inform us of actions more atrocious than that I have invented. Séïde at leaſt does not know that the man he murders is his father and, when he has ſtruck the blow, he feels a repentance as great as his crime. But Mézeray relates that at Melun a father killed his son with his own hand on account of his religion, and felt no remorse. We know the incident of the two brothers Diaz, one of whom was at Rome and the other in Germany at the beginning of the diſturbances excited by Luther. Barthélemy Diaz, learning at Rome that his brother was inclining to Luther's opinions at Frankfort, left Rome with the intention of murdering him, arrived there

and did murder him. I have read in Herrera, a Spanish author, that "Barthélemy Diaz underwent great perils in this action; but nothing shakes a man of honour conducted by probity." Herrera, with a holy religion completely opposed to cruelty, a religion which teaches us to endure and not to take vengeance, was convinced that probity might lead a man to murder and fratricide; and no one rose up against these infernal maxims!

These are the maxims which placed a dagger in the hand of the monster who deprived France of Henry the Great; set the portrait of Jacques Clément on the altar and his name among the Blessed; cost his life to William Prince of Orange, creator of the liberty and grandeur of the Dutch. Salcède first wounded him in the head with a pistol-shot; and Strada relates that "Salcède (these are his own words) dared not undertake this action until he had purified his soul by confession at the feet of a Dominican and had strengthened it with Heavenly bread." Herrera says something more outrageous and atrocious: "Estando firme con el exemplo de nuestro Salvadore Jesu-Christo, y de sus Santos." Balthazar Gérard who finally deprived that great man of life, had acted in the same way as Salcède.

I observe that all who have committed similar crimes in good faith were young men like Séïde. Balthazar Gérard was about twenty. Four Spaniards, who had taken an oath with him to kill the prince, were of the same age. The monster who killed Henri III was only twenty-three. Poltrot, who mur-

dered the great Duke of Guise, was twenty-five; this is the age of seduction and of fury. In England I almoſt became an eye-witness of the power of fanaticism upon a weak and youthful imagination. A boy of sixteen named Shepherd undertook to murder your maternal grandfather, King George I. What cause led him to that frenzy? Simply that Shepherd did not hold the same religion as the king. They had pity on his youth, they offered him pardon, they long urged him to repentence; he persiſted in saying that it was better to obey God than men and that, if he were free, the firſt use he would make of his liberty would be to kill his king. And thus they were compelled to send him to execution as a monſter they despaired of taming.

I dare to say that anyone who has lived with men may have seen sometimes how ready they are to sacrifice nature to superſtition. How many fathers have hated and disinherited their children! How many brothers harried their brothers, from this disaſtrous principle! I have seen examples in more than one family.

If superſtition does not always make itself known by those excesses which are numbered in the hiſtory of crime, it causes all the innumerable daily little evils in society that it can. It divides friends; it separates relatives; it persecutes the sage, who is only an honeſt man, by the hand of the madman, who is an Enthusiaſt; it does not always give the hemlock to Socrates, but it banished Descartes from a town which should be the refuge of liberty; it gave Jurieu, who played the

prophet, sufficient influence to reduce the learned and philosophical Bayle to penury; it banished, it tore the successor of the great Leibnitz from that flower of youth which flocked to his lessons; and to re-establish him Heaven had to send a philosophical king, a real miracle which very seldom happens. In vain does human reason perfect itself by philosophy, which makes such progress in Europe; in vain, great prince, do you strive to practise and to inspire this humane philosophy; in this very age, when reason lifts her throne on the one side, we see the most absurd fanaticism still build its altars on the other.

LIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Ohlau, 16th April, 1741

They say the Austrians are beaten[1], and I think it is true. You see the lyre of Horace has its turn after the club of Hercules[2]. To do one's duty, to be accessible to pleasures, to skirmish with enemies, to be absent and not forget one's friends, are things perfectly compatible so long as we are able to set limits to each of them. Doubt all others; but never be such a Pyrrhonian as to doubt my esteem for you.

[1] Mollwitz, 10th April, 1741. [2] Most of this letter is in verse.

LX

From Voltaire

5th May, 1741

Sire,

To write verses and good verses after a victory is unique and therefore reserved to your Majesty. You have beaten Neipperg and Voltaire. Your Majesty should put laurel leaves in your letters, like the ancient Roman generals. You deserve at once the triumph of a general and of a poet, and you need at least two laurel leaves.

I learn that Maupertuis is at Vienna; I pity him more than another; but I pity anyone who is not near your person.

They say Colonel Camas died much distressed at not being killed before your eyes. Major Knobertoff (whose name I write ill) at least had that sad honour, from which may God preserve your Majesty! I am sure of your glory, great king, but I am not sure of your life; among what dangers and labours you pass your wonderful life! Confederacies to foresee or to destroy, allies to make or to retain, sieges, battles, every kind of plan, every sort of action, and all the details of a hero. You will probably have everything except happiness. You can either make an emperor or prevent one from being made or make yourself an emperor. If the last should happen you will not be any the more a sacred Majesty to me.

LXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

In camp at Strehlen, 25th June, 1741

The announcement of your history gives me great pleasure; it will not add one little laurel leaf the more to those which the hand of Immortality prepares for you; in a word 'tis your glory I cherish; I am interested in the *Age of Louis XIV;* I admire you as a philosopher but I like you much better as a poet.

History and poetry offer a much freer field to the mind. They deal with objects within our grasp, with authentic facts and smiling pictures. True philosophy is firmness of soul and clearness of mind which prevents us from falling into the errors of the vulgar and from believing in effects without a cause.

Yours is certainly beautiful poetry; it contains all the best produced by the poets of antiquity. You and your muse are everything you wish to be. It is not granted to everyone to be a Proteus like you; and we poor human beings are obliged to content ourselves with the little talent miserly nature has deigned to give us.

I can send you no news from this camp where we are the quietest people imaginable. Our hussars are the heros of the play during this entr'acte, while I am harangued by ambassadors, the Silesians are made cuckolds, etc., etc.

Compliments to the Marquise.

LXII

From Voltaire[1]

Cirey, 21st December, 1741

Soleil pâle flambeau de nos tristes hivers. . .[2]

This is what I was saying, Sire, this morning to your colleague, the sun, who is also the soul of one part of this world. I would say much more about your Majesty if I had that facility in writing verses I no longer have and you have. I received here those you wrote in Neisse as easily as you took the city. This little anecdote joined to the verses your Humanity sent me immediately after the victory of Mollwitz furnish very curious memoirs which will one day be useful to history.

Louis XIV took Franche-Comté in the winter; but he fought no battle and wrote no verses in camp before Dôle or Besançon; I take the liberty to inform your Majesty that the history of Louis XIV seems to me too narrow a circle; I find that Frederick enlarges the sphere of my ideas. The verses your Majesty wrote at Neisse are like those Solomon made in his glory when, after having experienced everything, he said: " All is vanity ". 'Tis true the man talked in this way in the middle of three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines; and all this without having fought a battle or made a siege. But, Sire,

[1] There exists a slightly different version of this letter.

[2] Sun, pale torch of our gloomy winters. . .

with all respect to Solomon and to you, or rather to you and to Solomon, there is still some reality in this world.

Your Majesty has done many things in a short time. I am convinced that there is no one in the world busier than you and more engaged in a variety of affairs of all kinds. But with this consuming genius, which brings so many things into the sphere of its activity, you will always preserve that superiority of reason which raises you above all you are and all you do.

The only thing I dread is lest you should come to despise men too much. Millions of featherless two-footed animals who people the earth are at an immense distance from your person, in mind as well as in estate. There is a fine verse of Milton: "Amongst unequals no society."

There is another misfortune; your Majesty paints so well the noble deceits of politicians, the self-interested attentions of courtiers, etc., that you will end up by suspecting the affection of men of all kinds, and you will believe that it is morally proved that a king is not loved for himself. Sire, let me take the liberty to give a demonstration also. Is it not true that we cannot prevent ourselves from loving for his own sake a man of superior mind who possesses many talents and adds to them the talent of pleasing? Now, if it unfortunately happen that this superior genius is a king, should he suffer for it? And will he be less loved because he wears a crown? For my part, I feel that the crown will never chill me.

LXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 8th January, 1742

My dear Voltaire,

I owe you two letters to my great regret, and I am so busy with those important affairs which philosophers call trash, that I cannot yet think of my pleasure, the only solid good in this life. I suppose God created donkeys, Doric columns and kings to bear the burdens of this world, where so many others are made to enjoy the good things it produces.

At the present moment I am engaged in arguing with a score of more or less dangerous Machiavellis. Charming Poetry waits at the door, without obtaining an audience. One person talks to me of boundaries; another of rights; another of reimbursements; another of auxiliaries; another of marriage-contracts, of debts to be paid, of intrigues to make, of recommendations, of plans, etc. It is publicly stated that you have done something you have never thought of; it is supposed that you are annoyed by an event which delights you; somebody writes from Mexico that you are about to attack another person whom you have every interest to conciliate; you are ridiculed, you are criticised; a journalist satirises you; your neighbours tear you to pieces; every one wishes you at the devil while overwhelming you with protestations of friendship. Such is the world; and such, roughly speaking, are the matters which busy me.

Would you like to bargain poetry for politics? The only similarity between them is that politicians and poets are the plaything of the public, and the objects of their colleagues' satire.

The day after to-morrow I am going to Rheinsberg to take up once more the crook and the lyre, and please Heaven may I never abandon them again! I shall write to you from that pleasant solitude with more calmness of mind. Perhaps Calliope will inspire me again.

LXIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Olmütz, 3rd February, 1742

My dear Voltaire,

The demon which has hitherto driven me up and down has led me to Olmütz, to straighten out the affairs which the other allies have entangled, it is said. I do not know what will happen; but I do know that my star is too much of a wanderer. What can you expect from a brain where there is nothing but hay, oats and chaff?

I am now reading or rather devouring your *Age of Louis the Great*. If you love me, send me what you have added recently to this work; 'tis my sole consolation, my amusement, my recreation. You who only work from choice and genius, have pity on a political labourer, who only works from necessity.

Could one have foreseen, dear Voltaire, that a child of the muses was destined to move the great wheel of

events in Europe together with a dozen solemn fools who are called great politicians ? Yet 'tis an authentic fact, and not very honourable to Providence.

This reminds me of the tale of the curé to whom a peasant spoke of the Lord God with idiotic veneration. " Come, come," said the good priest, " You imagine more than there is; I make and sell him by the dozen and I know his true value."

The public usually has a superstitious idea of the great revolutions of empires; but when one is behind the scenes one can see that nearly always the most magical scenes are produced by common effects and by vile rogues who would only attract the indignation of the public if they showed themselves in their true condition.

Trickery, bad faith and duplicity are unfortunately the dominating characteristics of most of the men who are at the head of nations and should be an example to them. The study of the human heart in such persons is a most humiliating thing; it makes me regret a thousand times my dear solitude, the arts, my friends and my independence.

LXV

From Voltaire

March, 1742

Sire,

While I have been ill your Majesty has accomplished more great actions than I have endured fever fits. I could not reply to your Majesty's last favours.

Moreover, where should I have addressed my letter? To Vienna? To Pressburg? To Témesvar? You might have been in any one of these towns; and then, if there is a being who can be in several places at once, it is assuredly yourself, since you are the image of the Divinity, like all princes, and a very thinking and very active image. In short, Sire, I did not write because I was in bed when your Majesty was on horseback among snowstorms and victories.

I set only one foot on the banks of the Styx; but, Sire, I am most distressed by the number of poor wretches I saw pass over. Some came from Schärding, others from Prague or Iglau. Will you and the kings your colleagues never cease from ravaging this earth which, you say, you so much desire to make happy?

Au lieu de cette horrible guerre
Dont chacun sent les contre-coups,
Que ne vous en rapportez-vous
A ce bon abbé de Saint-Pierre?[1]

He would grant you everything as easily as Lycurgus shared the lands of Sparta and as they give equal shares to monks. He would establish the fifteen dominations of Henri IV. It is true however that Henri IV never thought of such a plan. The Duc de Sully's clerks, who wrote his memoirs, spoke of them; but Villeroi, Secretary of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs, does not speak of them. It is amusing

[1] Instead of this horrible war which affects everybody, why do you not address yourselves to the good Abbé de Saint-Pierre?

that the plan of upsetting so many thrones should be attributed to Henri IV who had scarcely secured his own. While awaiting the European assembly, Sire, which will make all monarchs moderate and content, your Majesty orders me to send you all I have written recently about the *Age of Louis XIV;* for you have the time to read when other men have not. My papers are being sent from Brussels; I will have them copied in order to obey your Majesty's orders. You will see perhaps that I cover too great a field, but I was working principally for you and I considered that the sphere of the world was not too great. In a month, Sire, I shall have the honour to send your Majesty an enormous parcel which will reach you in the middle of a battle or in a trench. I wonder if you are happier in all this clamour of glory than you were in the pleasant solitude of Rheinsberg.

LXVI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Tribau, 12th April, 1742

You ask me for how long my colleagues have agreed to ruin the earth; to this I answer that I have not the slightest knowledge but that it is now the fashion to make war and that I presume it will last a long time.

The Abbé de Saint-Pierre, who distinguishes me sufficiently to honour me with his correspondence,

has sent me a beautiful book on the way to re-establish peace in Europe and to retain it forever. The thing is most practicable; for its success all that is lacking is the consent of Europe and a few similar trifles.

How much I owe you, my dear Voltaire, for the very great pleasure you promise me by allowing me to hope that I shall soon receive the *History of Louis XIV!*

You think perhaps that I have not enough worries here and that I must in addition be troubled about your health. You should take more care of yourself; I beg you will remember how much I am interested in you and how much you should be attached to this world which you charm and delight.

You may be certain that the life I am leading has changed neither my character nor my way of thinking. I love Rheinsberg and its quiet days; but we must adapt ourselves to our station in life and make our duties a pleasure.

LXVII

From Voltaire

Paris, 15th May, 1742

I have some hope that your Majesty will strengthen Europe as you have shaken it and that my colleagues, the human race, will bless you after having admired you. My hope is not solely founded on the plan sent to your Majesty by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. I

presume that you see the things which this pacificist (too little regarded by the world) desires to see, and that the philosopher-king knows perfectly well what the philosopher who is not a king is vainly trying to guess. I also presume greatly upon your charitable intentions. But I am given a perfect certainty by the dozen of he and she cutters of capers whom your Majesty imports from France into your dominions. We never dance except in peace. True, you have made certain neighbouring powers pay for the orchestra; but 'tis for the common good and for your own. You have re-established the dignities and prerogatives of the Electors. You have suddenly become the arbiter of Germany; and when you have made an emperor, you will lack nothing but the title. With all this you possess one hundred and twenty thousand well-built, well-armed, well-dressed, well-fed and well-affected men; at whose head you have won battles and captured towns; Sire, it is for you to dance. Voiture would have told you that you have a dancing air; but I am not so familiar with great men and with kings as he was; and it does not befit me to play at charades with them.

Instead of twelve good academicians, Sire, you now have twelve good dancers. They are more easy to find and much gayer. Academicians have sometimes been seen to weary a hero when the actors of the Opera amused him.

The Opera, with which your Majesty decorates Berlin, does not prevent you from thinking of good letters. With you one taste does not harm the others.

There are some minds which have not a single taste; your mind has them all, and if God loved the human race a little he would bestow this universality upon all princes so that they might discern what is good in every kind and protect it. I imagine that it was for this they were originally made.

LXVIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

In Camp at Kuttenburg, 18th June, 1742

I hope that after I have made peace with my enemies I may in turn make it with you. I ask for the *Age of Louis XIV* to conclude it on your part, and I am sending you my own account of the last battle which you asked from me.

At present I can only entertain you with marches, shameful retreats, pursuits, cowardices, and all sorts of events which are none the less ridiculous because they are concerned with very serious matters.

Rottembourg is beginning to recover; he is entirely out of danger. Do not think me cruel, but sufficiently reasonable only to choose an evil in order to avoid a worse one. Any man who makes up his mind to pull out a decayed tooth will give battle when he wishes to end a war. At such a time to shed blood is to spare it; 'tis bleeding one's enemy when he is in a fever and giving him back his common sense.

LXIX

From Voltaire

July, 1742

O most extraordinary of all men! You win battles, you take provinces, you make peace, you write music and verses, and all so quickly and so gaily!

I have always hoped for universal peace, as much as if I were the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's bastard. To make peace for oneself alone is the action of a king who loves his own dominions and throne only; but this is not the way we philosophers think, for we hold that we must love the whole human race. The Abbé de Saint-Pierre will tell you, Sire, that to go to Heaven we must do good to the Chinese as well as to the inhabitants of Brandenburg and Silesia.

I hope soon to see your gallery at Charlottenburg, Sire, and to enjoy once more the happiness of seeing the victorious king, the pacific king, the citizen king, who has done so much so early. Next month I shall probably be in Brussels and I flatter myself that I shall have the honour of going from there to spend ten or a dozen days again with my adored king. Yes, Sire, setting aside heroism, throne, victories, all that imposes the most profound respect, I take the liberty, as you know, to love you with all my heart; but I should be unworthy of loving you to that extent and

of being loved by your Majesty if for the sake of the greatest man of his age I should desert another great man who, it is true, wears a mob-cap, but whose heart is as masculine as yours and whose courageous and unshakable friendship during ten years imposes upon me the duty of living near her.

I shall sacrifice in your temple, and return to her altars.

LXX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 25th July, 1742

The Queen of Hungary is very fortunate to have an advocate who understands the refinements and seductions of speech so well as you. I rejoice that our differences are not to be settled by a law-suit; for judging by your feelings in the Queen's favour and your talents, I should never have been able to hold out against Apollo and Venus. It is easy for you to declaim against those who support their rights and claims by force of arms; but I remember a time when, if you had had an army, it would have marched at once against Desfontaines, Rousseau, van Duren, etc, etc. So long as the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's platonic arbitration does not exist, kings will have no other means of deciding their differences except by using force to wrest from their adversaries the just satisfaction they cannot obtain by any other means. The miseries and calamities which

result are like the diseases of the human body. The last war may therefore be considered as a slight fit of fever which seized Europe and left it almost immediately.

If all France condemns me for having made peace, Voltaire the philosopher will never let himself be carried away by numbers. First, it is a general rule that we are only bound to keep our promises so far as our strength permits. We made an alliance as people make a marriage-contract; I promised to make war as a husband promises to content the concupiscence of his new wife. But, just as in marriage the woman's desires often absorb the husband's strength, so in war the weakness of allies increases the burden upon one and makes it unendurable. And to conclude the comparison, when a husband thinks he has sufficient proofs of his wife's infidelity, nothing can prevent him from obtaining a divorce. I do not push home the application of this last article; but you are sufficiently instructed and enough of a politician to know what I mean.

LXXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 7th August, 1742

My dear Voltaire,

You say such fine things to me poetically that my head would be turned if I believed them. I beg you let us have no more heros, heroism, and all those big words which, now there is peace, are only fit to

fill out a few pages of a novel or a few lines of a tragedy with pompous balderdash.

The brilliant shafts of your imagination are never more charming than in playful jest. It is not given to everyone to make the mind laugh; much natural gaiety is needed to communicate it to others.

You protest because I think you have a passion for the Marquise du Châtelet; I thought I should deserve your thanks because I presumed to rate you so highly. The Marquise is handsome, amiable; you are inflammable, she has a heart; you have sentiments, she is not of marble; you have lived together for ten years. Would you have me believe that during all that time you have talked of nothing but philosophy to the most charming woman in France? My dear friend, be it said without displeasing you, you would in that case have played a very poor part. I did not think that pleasure was exiled from the temple of *Virtue* where you live.

In any case, you have promised to sacrifice some of your days to me; and that is sufficient for me. The more I think that to be absent from the Marquise costs you some effort, the more grateful I shall be to you. Beware of undeceiving me.

Good-bye, dear Voltaire; be just to your friends. Sacrifice on the altars of Madame du Châtelet; but in your intercourse with the gods do not forget the men who esteem you, and grant them some of your moments.

LXXII

From Voltaire

Brussels, November, 1742

Sire,

I am very happy that the wiseſt of kings is not displeased with my vaſt picture of the follies of men. Your Majeſty is right to say that the age in which we live has many advantages over the centuries of darkness and cruelty,

> Et qu'il vaut mieux, ô blasphèmes maudits !
> Vivre à présent qu'avoir vécu jadis.[1]

Would to God that all princes might have thought like my hero! There would have been no religious wars, no faggots lighted to burn poor devils who pretended that God exiſts in a piece of bread in a manner different from that underſtood by St Thomas. There is a Casuiſt who enquires whether the Virgin had any pleasure in the co-operation and obumbration of the Holy Ghost; he holds for the affirmative and adduces very good reasons. Handsome books have been written againſt him; but in this dispute nobody has been burnt and no towns have been deſtroyed. If the partisans of Luther, of Zwingle, of Calvin and the Pope had acted in the same way there could have been nothing but pleasure in living with such people.

[1] And it is better, O accursed blasphemy !
To live now than to have lived of old.

These fanatical quarrels only exist now in France. The Jansenists and the Molinists keep up a quarrel which might become serious, because these fantasies are treated seriously.

A prince need only jest at them and his people will laugh at them; but princes who have confessors are rarely philosophers.

LXXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 5th December, 1742

In place of your *Pucelle* and your wonderful history, I send you a little comedy containing an extract of all the follies I have been able to collect and knit together. I had it played at Césarion's wedding, and it was very badly played too. D'Éguilles has arrived and gave me your letter dated some time back. They say there is more in him than in his brother; but I am not yet able to judge. I have only the alpha and the omega of the *Pucelle;* if I could have the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh cantos, you would then have put me fully in possession of a treasure.

If Paris is the Island of Cytherea you are assuredly the satellite of Venus; you revolve round that planet and follow the course it moves through from Paris to Brussels and from Brussels to Cirey. Berlin has nothing which can attract you, unless our astronomers of the Academy incite you with their long telescopes. We northern people are not as soft as the people of

the west; with us men are less effeminate and consequently more masculine, more capable of work, of patience and perhaps in truth less agreeable. It is precisely the sybaritic life people lead in Paris so much praised by you which has destroyed the reputation of your troops and your generals.

Good-bye, dear Voltaire; write to me often and above all send me your works and *La Pucelle*.

LXXIV

From Voltaire

Paris, December, 1742

Your Humanity is more adorable than ever; it is impossible to call you "Your Majesty" always. That is all very well for the princes of the Empire who see in you only the king; but I who see the man, and am sometimes enthusiastic, forget the monarch in my delight and think only of the enchanting man.

If the Queen of Hungary and the King my lord and master saw your Majesty's letter, they could not prevent themselves from laughing in spite of the harm you have done the one and the good you have not done the other. Your comparison of a coquette, and even of something better, who distributes her rather burning favours, and who jests at her gallants taking remedies, is as amusing as anything said by the Cæsars, the Anthonys, and the Octavians, your predecessors, men of great actions and good jests. Do

as you please with kings; beat them, desert them, quarrel and be reconciled; but never be inconstant to the private men who adore you.

There is nothing new among us sybarites at Paris. Here is the only thing worthy to be told your Majesty. Two days ago Cardinal Fleury who had been rather ill, decided to say Mass at a little altar in the middle of a garden where it was freezing. M. Amelot and M. de Breteuil came and told him that he was playing with death. "Well, gentlemen, well", he said, "you are too self-indulgent." At ninety! What a man! Sire, live as long even if you have to say Mass at that age and I have to be the acolyte.

LXXV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Magdeberg, 25th June, 1743

At present I am more wandering than d'Argens's writing and travelling Jew. Like a new Sisyphus, I turn the wheel on which I am condemned to labour; now in one province and now in another, I keep up the movement of my little State, strengthening in the shadow of peace what I owe to the arms of war, reforming old abuses—and giving occasion for new ones; in short, correcting errors and making similar ones. This tumultuous life may last two months, if the devil who drives me on has not resolved to devil me longer. I think I shall have to go to Aix to

correct the incorrigible works of my belly, which sometimes make your friend wish himself at the devil. If I could have the pleasure of seeing you, it would be very agreeable to me.

If you would come and live in this country I promise you an establishment which I flatter myself would satisfy you, and above all that you should be beyond the annoyances and persecutions of bigots. You have suffered too many wrongs in France to be able to stay there with honour; you should leave a country where your reputation is stabbed every day and where the highest offices are filled by Midases.

LXXVI

From Voltaire

The Hague, 28th June, 1743

Has my hero received my letters from Paris in which I informed him that I was escaping to pay my court to him? I sent it to David Girard and it was addressed to M. Frédérics-Hof. Now, David Girard cannot be such an imbecile as not to realise that M. Frédérics-Hof is the greatest king we have, the greatest man, he who possesses my heart, he whose presence would make me happy for a few days.

I am waiting at the house of M. de Podewils, at the Hague, for your Humanity's orders and your Majesty's *vorspann*.[1]

[1] A relay of horses. Voltaire spells it "forspan".

May I see the great Frederick once more and may I never again see that pedant of a Boyer, that old Bishop of Mirepoix, who would please me far more if he were at least twenty years older.

LXXVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Rheinsberg, 3rd July, 1743

I am sending you with great eagerness the permit for the horses. You will not be driven behind Bucephaluses or Pegasuses; but I shall like them more because they will bring Apollo to Berlin.

You will be received with open arms and I will provide you with the best establishment I can.

I am about to leave for Stettin and thence for Silesia; but I shall find a moment to see you and to assure you how much I esteem you.

LXXVIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

7th October, 1743

France has hitherto been considered the refuge of unfortunate kings; I wish my capital to become the temple of great men. Come, my dear Voltaire, and demand anything that may be agreeable to you. I

wish to please you; and to oblige a man one must enter into his manner of thinking.

Choose an apartment or a house, arrange yourself what you need for the pleasure and superfluities of life; make your surroundings such as you would wish them in order to be happy; it is for me to provide for the rest. You will always be free and entire master of your fate; I do not pretend to chain you with friendship and comfort.

You shall have permits for horses and everything you can ask. I shall see you on Wednesday and I shall profit by the moments which are left me to enlighten myself at the fire of your powerful genius. I beg you to believe that I shall always be the same towards you.

LXXIX

From Voltaire

Paris, 7th January, 1744

Sire,

I receive at one and the same time enough to turn more than one head; an old letter of your Majesty's dated the 29th of November, two medals which represent at least a part of the physiognomy of the king and the man of genius, the portraits of her Majesty the Queen Mother and the Princess Ulrica and, as the height of favour, charming verses from the great Frederick.

The Marquis de Fénelon had all these treasures in his pocket and refrained from parting with them as

long as he could. He dragged out the negotiation as long as if he had been dealing with the Dutch. At last I am in possession of them; I kissed all the portraits; the Princess Ulrica may blush if she will.

Il est fort insolent de baiser sans scrupule
De votre auguste soeur les modestes appas :
Mais les voir, les tenir, et ne les baiser pas,
Cela serait trop ridicule.[1]

I did as much, Sire, to your verses whose harmony and vivacity had nearly as much effect upon me as her royal Highness's miniature.

LXXX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

7th April, 1744

Your *Mérope* has reached me and I have done the author's commission by distributing his book. I am not surprised at the success of this play. The corrections you have given it make it superior to all your other plays in wisdom, in construction, in probability and in interest, although *Mahomet* has more strength and *Brutus* more beautiful verses.

My sister Ulrica sees your dream coming true in part; a king has asked for her as his wife; the good wishes of the whole Swedish nation are with her.

[1] It is very insolent to kiss without scruple the modest charms of your august sister : but to see and to hold them and not to kiss them would be too ridiculous.

My tender love for her obliges me to yield to this enthusiasm, this fanaticism. She is going to a country where her talents will enable her to play a great and noble part.

Please tell Rottembourg, if you see him, that it is not well in him not to write to me since he is in Paris. I hear no more of him than I should if he were in Pekin. Your Parisian air is like the fountain of Youth and your pleasures like the charms of Circe; but I hope Rottembourg will escape metamorphosis.

Good-bye, adorable historian, great poet, charming author of the *Pucelle*, invisible and piteous prisoner of Circe; good-bye to the lover of Valory's cook, of Madame du Châtelet and of my sister. I recommend myself to the protection of all your talents and especially of your taste for study, from which I expect the most agreeable amusement.

LXXXI

From Voltaire

Paris, 22nd September, 1746

Sire,

Your person will always be dear to me, as your name will ever be respected even by your enemies and glorious to posterity. Thiériot informed me some months ago that you had lost in the confusion of one of your battles the beginning of the *History of Louis XIV* which I had the honour to place in your Majesty's hands. Some days afterwards I sent to Cirey for the original manuscript from which I caused a fresh copy

to be made. M. de Maupertuis left Paris before the copy was ready, otherwise I should have burdened him with it; he told me the strange reason alleged by Thiériot to your Majesty whereby Thiériot excused himself from sending it. This has decided me to urge on the copyists and to make them put aside all other work. I have taken the *History of Louis XIV* to Jordan's correspondent and your Majesty will probably receive it with this letter.

I am not only sending you this history, Sire, but I shall also provide your Majesty with the tragedy of *Sémiramis*, which I wrote for the Dauphine who has been taken from us. I could not give you *La Pucelle;* I should have been compelled to use violence and that is only good with Pandours and Hussars. It is against my will that I do not place in your hands everything I have ever done; it is but justice that they should be in the possession of the one man in this world most capable of judging them. I do not think that my health will allow me to work much hereafter; I am fallen into a state where I think there is no help for me. I await death patiently and if your Majesty will permit it I shall take care that all my manuscripts are faithfully delivered to you after my death, and your Majesty shall dispose of them as you wish. It is a most consoling idea to me that all that has occupied me during my life will only pass from me into the hands of the great Frederick.

Madame du Châtelet and I, Sire, are still occupied by the same veneration for your Majesty and she easily prefers you to all the monads of Leibnitz.

Everything reminds her of you; your portrait, which is in her room on the right of Louis XIV; your medals which are between Newton and Marlborough; your service of plate from which she often eats; and finally your reputation which is present everywhere at all moments.

For my part, Sire, I have no regret in this world except that of not seeing the greatest man who ornaments it. I shall finish my career peaceably and I shall end by protesting that I have always lived with the truest attachment and the most profound respect, etc.

LXXXII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 18th December, 1746

As long as you only die metaphorically, I shall leave you to it. Confess yourself, have your face greased with holy oils, receive all the seven sacraments at once, if you wish; it matters little to me; however I shall take care not to be so certain of you in your so-called death-agony as the Dutch were of Marshal Saxe. You French are certainly astounding. Your heros win battles with death on their lips and your poets write immortal works in their death-agony. What will you do if ever nature should take the whim to render you healthy and robust!

The anecdotes of the private life of Louis XIV gave me great pleasure although, as a matter of fact,

I found nothing new in them. I wish you would not write the campaign of '41 but give the last touches to the *Age of Louis the Great*. Contemporary authors are accused by all ages of falling into the bitterness of satire or the fatuity of flattery. If there were any means to make you write a bad book it would be by compelling you to work on that you have undertaken. It is for men to accomplish great things, and for impartial posterity to pronounce upon them and their actions.

Take my advice and finish the *Pucelle*. It is far better to amuse honest men than to write gazettes for blackguards. A Hercules, chained down by too many bonds, must loose his strength and become flabbier than the cowardly Paris.

Maupertuis is recovering from his illness. The whole town is interested in him; he is our Palladium and the finest conquest I ever made in my life. As for you, you are inconstant, ungrateful, perfidious. . . . What could I not say if I were not merciful to you and all Frenchmen for the sake of Louis XV!

Good-bye, the vesper-bell is ringing for the theatre.

LXXXIII

From Voltaire

Paris, 9th February, 1747

Well, Sire, you shall have *Sémiramis;* it is not made of rosewater and for this reason I am not giving it

to our nation of sybarites, but to a king who thinks as the French thought in the time of the great Corneille and the great Condé, who wishes a tragedy to be tragic and a comedy comic.

Heaven preserve me, Sire, from printing my history of the War of 1741! These are fruits which time alone can ripen; I have certainly written neither a panegyric nor a satire; but the more I love truth the less should I waste it. I worked from the memoirs and letters of generals and ministers. This is material for posterity; for on what foundations can history be built if contemporaries leave nothing with which to raise up the edifice? Cæsar wrote his commentaries and you are writing yours; but where are the actors who can thus give an account of the great part they have played? Was Marshal Broglie a man to write commentaries?

I have seen the Duc de Richelieu who is in despair at not having been able to pay his court to the greatest man of our days. He cannot be consoled; and for my part I ask of nature only a month or two of health so that I can once more see this great man before I go to the land where Achilles and Thersites, Corneille and Danchet, are equal. I shall remain attached to your Majesty until that fine moment when we depart at a given time to find out what are the soul, the infinite matter and the essence of things.

LXXXIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 22nd February, 1747

So your taste for history is finally confirmed; follow this strange impulse since you must; I do not oppose it. The work which occupies me is not a book of memoirs nor of commentaries; my personal feelings do not enter into it. It is fatuous for any man to think himself so remarkable that the whole universe must be informed of the details concerning him individually. I am painting the upheaval of Europe broadly; I have sketched the absurdities and contradictions which may be noticed in those who govern it. I have given a summary of the most important negotiations and of the most remarkable events of the war, and I have seasoned these narratives with reflections on the causes of events and on the different effects produced by the same thing when it happens in different times or in different nations.

If you continue to write about the recent wars I shall have to yield this battle-field to you; moreover my book is not written for the public.

I thought very seriously that I was about to die, having had an attack of partial apoplexy; my constitution and my age called me back to life. If I had gone down below, I should have watched Lucretius and Virgil until the moment when I saw you arrive; for you could have no other place in Elysium except

between those two gentlemen. However I should rather make an appointment with you in this world. My curiosity about the infinite and the principles of things is not sufficient to make me hasten the journey. You give me hopes of seeing you again; I shall not rejoice until I see you, for I have no great faith in this journey. However you can be certain you will be well received.

You lent your *Pucelle* to the Duchess of Würtemberg; you must know that she had it copied during the night. Such are the people you confide in; and those who deserve your confidence or rather those to whom you should abandon yourself completely are the very persons whom you mistrust.

LXXXV

From Voltaire

Versailles, 9th March, 1747

Rumour, who has always a hundred mouths open to speak of kings and opens a thousand for you, had reported here that your Majesty was at the last gasp and that there was very little hope. This bad news would have given you great pleasure, Sire, if you had seen how it was received. You may be sure we were in consternation and that you would not have been more regretted in your own dominions. You would have enjoyed all your fame, you would have seen the

effect produced upon an enthusiastic nation by unique merits; you would have felt all the pleasure of being cherished by a nation which with all its faults is perhaps the only dispenser of glory in the universe. The English only praise the English; the Italians are nothing; the Spaniards have scarcely a hero and not one writer; in Germany Leibnitz's monads and pre-established harmony will not immortalise any great man. You know, Sire, I have no prejudice in favour of my country but I dare to assert that it is the only one which raises monuments to the glory of great men who are not born in its midst.

For my part, Sire, your peril made me shudder and cost me many a tear.

I shall be tempted to think that Stahl's pills must have done good to the King of Prussia; they were invented in Berlin and have latterly almost cured me. If they have patched up a little my sickly body, what will they not do to a hero's constitution! If some day they give me back a little of my strength I shall assuredly ask permission to come and admire you once more. The lady of Cirey, who was as much alarmed as I, begs permission to express her joy and her respectful attachment to you. Live, Sire, live, great man, and may I live to kiss once more that victorious hand which has achieved and written what will pass to the most distant posterity!

LXXXVI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 29th November, 1748

A propos King Stanislas, I think he lives a very happy life. They say that he enchants Madame du Châtelet and the gentleman in ordinary of the chamber to Louis XV, that is to say he cannot do without you both. 'Tis reasonable, 'tis well. The fate of men is very different; while he enjoys all sorts of pleasures, I, poor fool, perhaps cursed by God, write verses. Let us turn to more serious topics. Do you know I am angry with you, really angry? How could I fail to be? for

> Du plus bel esprit de la France,
> Du poëte le plus brillant,
> Je n'ai reçu, depuis un an,
> Ni vers ni pièce d'éloquence.[1]

The public news puts me in a bad temper. Since you are not in Paris, I think you might as well be in Berlin as in Lunéville. If Madame du Châtelet is a woman of compositions, I propose to borrow her Voltaire on security. We have here a fat Cyclops of a geometer whom we will pledge in exchange for the wit; but let her make up her mind quickly. Our man has only one eye left and a new curve which he is now calculating might make him wholly blind

[1] From the finest mind in France, from the most brilliant poet I have received neither verse nor piece of eloquence for a year.

before our bargain is concluded. Let me know her reply and at the same time receive in good part the profound salutations my muse makes to your powerful genius.

LXXXVII

From Voltaire

Cirey, January, 1749

Young d'Arnaud who, from his morals and his wit, appears worthy to serve your Majesty, informed me some time ago that you had been graciously pleased to remember the oldest servant you have in France and the most passionate admirer you have in Europe; but I was born unfortunate. I have not received the orders with which your Majesty honoured me; I was in Lorraine, at the court of King Stanislas. I know all people of good sense will ask why I am at the court of Lunéville and not at the court of Berlin. Sire, the reason is that Lunéville is near the waters of Plombières, and that I often go there to prolong for a few days the existence of an unhappy machine in which is a soul entirely your Majesty's. I returned from Lunéville to this old Cirey where you have given me so many marks of your favours; where we saw your ambassador Keyserlingk, whose death we deplore, and who loved you so truly; where we have your portraits in canvas and in oil, and where we speak daily of the promise you gave in those days and of

how you have since surpassed it. In short, Sire, the courier who had your parcel, did not deliver it either at Lunéville or at Cirey. I am having it sought for everywhere, and meanwhile, I express my grief to you. It is not probable that the parcel is lost; but there are so many accidents that I may not receive it for a fortnight. Whether it be prose or verse I feel what a loss I suffer.

I am informed that your Majesty has not wholly abandoned poetry, and that while you give yourself to history you still lend yourself to fiction. The time which others waste in following dogs which run after a fox or a deer you spend in learning and in the instruction of mankind. You sent charming verses to M. de Maupertuis. I assure you none of our ministers could answer your majesty in verse, and that all the cabinets of the kings of Europe joined together could not even provide you with an ode, unless Lord Chesterfield is a member of the English cabinet; and he would only give you English verse in which your Majesty takes no interest. I admire your verses passionately, Sire, but write none myself; I limit myself to prose as a wretched historiographer should; I count the poor people killed in the last war and always tell the truth within a few thousand. I demolish the towns on the Dutch frontier, I fight twenty battles which bore me exceedingly; and when all is done I shall allow nothing to appear; for, in order to publish a history the people who can contradict us must be dead.

LXXXVIII

From Voltaire

Cirey, 26th January, 1749

Sire,

At last I have received the parcel of the 29th November with which your Majesty honoured me. An accursed courier, who took charge of this parcel which was very stupidly enclosed in a box sent from Paris to Madame du Châtelet, took it to Strasbourg and from there to the town of Troyes where I was obliged to send for it.

We always come back to our tastes; you write verses when you have no battles to fight. I thought you were entirely given up to prose. You cuff the ears of the Austrians and the Saxons, you dictate peace in Dresden, you sound the depths of metaphysics, you write memoirs of an age in which you are the first man; you write verses and write more than I do, for I have given up the job.

I have not yet seen those your Majesty made for M. de Maupertuis but I had already seen some from the epistle to your president of *xx* and the fine arts.

The *Epistle on Vanity and Self-Interest* gave me more pleasure even than the fashionable tone and light graces of a familiar epistle.

I could easily believe that the *Ode on War* is by some poor citizen, who is also a good poet, weary of paying his tenth, and the tenth of the tenth and of seeing his land ravaged in the quarrels of kings. Not

at all, it is by the king who began the quarrel, it is by him who won, with weapon in hand, a province and six battles. Sire, your Majesty writes beautiful verses but you laugh at the world.

Yet who knows whether you did not really think it all when you wrote it? It might quite well be that humanity spoke to you in the same cabinet where policy and love of fame signed the order to assemble armies. To-day a man is animated by the passion of heroes, to-morrow he thinks as a philosopher. It all agrees together wonderfully, according to the way the works of the thinking machine are wound up. 'Tis a proof of what you deigned to write me ten years ago on Liberty.

I re-read here that very philosophical little piece; it makes one tremble. The more I think of it, the more I advance towards your Majesty's opinion. I greatly desired us to be free; I did all I could to believe it. Experience and reason convince me that we are machines made to run a certain time and as God pleases. Give thanks to nature for the way in which your machine is made and that it was wound up to write the *Épître à Hermotime*.

You deign, Sire, to wish that I might be so happy as to come and pay my court to you. I travel in the winter in the state I am in! Would to God I could! But my heart and my body are not of the same species. And then, Sire, could you endure me? I have had an illness which has made me deaf in one ear and has made me loose my teeth. The Plombières waters have left me languid. I should be an agreeable corpse

to carry to Potsdam and to pass through your guard! I am going to keep snug in Paris by the fire. The king my master has been good enough to excuse me all service. If I can patch myself up a little this winter it would be very delightful to me to come and throw myself at your feet in the beginning of the summer; it would be a renewal of youth for me. But can I hope it? I have a breath of life and that breath is yours. But I should like to come to Berlin with M. de Séchelles, whom your Majesty knows; you would perhaps have more faith in an army commissary who speaks thickly and who did me the service of arresting in Brussels the Desvignes woman who still had in her possession the papers she had stolen from Madame du Châtelet and which she had already bargained for with the knavish booksellers of Amsterdam. Your Majesty can easily obtain confirmation of this. I confess, Sire, I was greatly distressed that you suspected that I might have disguised anything. But even if the Amsterdam booksellers are rogues ripe for hanging, after all, should the great Frederick be angry that posterity should know he honoured me with his favours? For my part, Sire, I wish I had never printed anything; I wish I had only written for you, I wish I had passed all my days at your Court and might spend the rest of my life in admiring you close at hand. I have committed a very great folly in cultivating letters for the public good. It must be put among those dangerous vanities of which you speak so well and in truth all is vanity, except to spend one's days near a man like you.

LXXXIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 13th February, 1749

I receive with pleasure two letters from you at once; confess that my large parcel of verses seemed rather ridiculous to you. It seems to me like Thersites testing his valour against Achilles. I hoped that your letters would contain a criticism of the poems such as you used to write when I lived at Rheinsberg where poor Keyserlingk, whom I regret and always shall regret, admired you. But Voltaire, become a courtier, only knows how to praise; I admit it is a less dangerous occupation. But do not think my poetic self-esteem would have been offended by your correction; I am not so fatuous as to suppose that a German could write good French verses.

Do not be surprised by my *Ode on War;* I assure you those are my sentiments. Distinguish between the statesman and the philosopher and know that we may make war from Reason, that we may be politic from duty, and philosophic by inclination. Men are hardly ever placed in the world as they would choose; and that is why there are so many bad cobblers, bad priests, bad ministers and bad princes.

I did not expect to see you until this summer; if it is possible and if you will take a turn here in the month of July, you will give me great pleasure. I promise to read you an epic poem of about four thousand lines,

the hero of which is Valory; the only thing missing is that servant who inflamed your senses with seditious flames which her modesty so sharply suppressed. I can ever promise you more tractable beauties. Come without teeth, without ears, without eyes, and without legs, if you cannot come otherwise; so long as that indefinable something which makes you think and inspires you so beautifully comes with you, that will suffice. I shall be glad to receive the fragments of Louis XV's campaigns, but it would give me still more satisfaction to see the end of the *Age of Louis XIV*. You finish nothing, and that work alone would make a man's reputation. You are the only French poet, and Voltaire and Montesquieu are the only prose writers. If you divorce the muses, who then will be permitted to write, or rather what modern work shall we be able to endure reading?

Do not sulk with the public and do not imitate the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, who punished the sins of the fathers unto the fourth generation. The persecutions of envy are a tribute which merit pays to the crowd. If a few miserable authors clamour against you, do not think that nations and posterity will be duped by them. I guarantee you will be made a deity after your death. However, do not be in a hurry to become a god; content yourself with having your apotheosis in your pocket, and with being esteemed by all persons who are above envy and prejudices, among whom I beg you will count me.

XC

From Voltaire

Paris, 17th February, 1749

Sire,

It is not enough to be a king and to be a great man in a dozen ways, you must aid the unfortunate who are attached to you. I reached Paris a paralytic and I am still in bed. Vespasian healed a blind man; you are greater than he. Why should you not heal me? I have not found anything yet which does me more good than Stahl's pills, and we have only bad imitations of them in Paris. I see that my whole salvation is in Berlin. Your Majesty will perhaps tell me that King Stanislas is my doctor and will refer me back to him. Well, Sire, I take King Stanislas as my doctor and the King of Prussia as my saviour.

I beg your Majesty to be graciously pleased to send me a pound of genuine Stahl's pills.

Sire, bring me to a state which will enable me to pay you my court at the beginning of the summer. Such a journey would give me a few more years of life. I should renew the sinking fire of my soul near my sun.

XCI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 5th March, 1749

The pills you ask of me are sufficient to purge all France and to kill your three Academies. Do not imagine that these pills are sweetmeats; you might make a mistake. I have ordered Darget to send you these pills which have so much reputation in France and which were made by the deceased Stahl's coachman. Here they are only used by pregnant women. You are certainly very quaint to ask remedies of me who am always incredulous in the matter of medicine.

Do what you can to get better; health is the only good thing in this world; it matters little whether you are cured by pills, senna or clysters; the means are indifferent so long as I have the pleasure of hearing you, for it will not be possible to see you; you must be entirely invisible at present.

We foreigners, who do not renounce reason, nevertheless feel that we can never attain the elegance and purity exacted by the rigorous laws of French poetry. This study needs a man's whole time; I am distracted by a thousand duties and a thousand occupations. I am a galley-slave chained to the vessel of state or like a pirate who dares not leave the rudder or go to sleep without fearing the fate of the unhappy Palinurus. The muses demand solitude and a complete tranquillity of mind which I can hardly ever

enjoy. I am often interrupted when I have written three lines; my muse grows cold and my mind is not easily worked up again. There are certain privileged spirits who write verses in the tumult of courts as they do in the solitudes of Cirey, in the Bastille and on the matresses of hotels; mine has not the honour to be among that number; it is a pineapple which bears fruit in a greenhouse and dies out of doors.

XCII

From Voltaire

Paris, 15th May, 1749

I believe your Majesty is now at Neisse or at Glogau, writing clever epigrams against the Russians. I beg, Sire, that you will also write some against the month of May, which deserves so little the name of spring, and during which we are as cold as in the winter. It seems to me that this May is the emblem of ill-deserved reputation. If the pills with which your Majesty has honoured my frailty give me back my vigour, I shall not go after M. de Valory's chambermaids; the female species would not make me travel half a league; I would go a thousand to be able to pay my court to you. But I beg you will grant me a favour which will cost you little; it is to be so good as to conquer some provinces towards the south, like Naples and Sicily, or the kingdom of Granada and Andalusia. Life is a pleasure in those countries where it is always warm. Your Majesty would not fail to

visit them every year, just as you visit Glogau, and I should be a most assiduous courtier. I would talk to you of verse or prose under the shade of pomegranates and orange trees and you would reanimate my frozen energy; I would cast flowers on the tombs of Keyserlingk and the successor of La Croze, whom your Majesty so happily snatched from the Church to attach to your person; and I should like to die like them, but very old, in your service; for indeed, Sire, it is very sad to live for long far from Frederick the Great.

XCIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

16*th May*, 1749

I am at present studying your criticisms and your corrections, which may prevent me from falling into my former errors; but I have still so many to avoid that you alone can save me from these reefs.

I beg you will sacrifice to me the two months you promise. Do not grow weary of instructing me; if my extreme desire to learn and to succeed in an art which has always been my passion, can reward you for your trouble, you will have reason to be satisfied.

I love the arts for the reason given by Cicero. I do not raise myself to the sciences, because good letters are useful at all times, and because a man with all the algebra in the world is often only an ass when he knows nothing else. Perhaps in ten years society may derive advantage from the curves which these

visionary algebraists will have laboriously squared. I congratulate posterity beforehand. But to tell you the truth I see nothing but a scientific extravagance in all these calculations. That which is neither useful nor agreeable is worthless. As for useful things, they have all been discovered; and as to those which are agreeable, I hope that good taste will not admit algebra among them.

There are only thistles and no laurels to gather on the banks of the Neva. Do not suppose that I go there for my own happiness; you will find me here, a peaceful citizen at Sans Souci, leading the life of a private philosopher.

If you are now in love with noise and glitter I advise you not to come here; but if a quiet, even life does not displease you, come and make good your promises. Tell me the exact date when you will leave and if the Marquise du Châtelet is a money-lender I mean to arrange with her to borrow you on a pledge, and to pay her by the day some interest which will please her for her poet, her wit, her . . ., etc.

XCIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

10th June, 1749

Never were such pretty verses written for pills; it is not because I am praised for them; I am quite aware of the custom of kings and poets there; but,

quite apart from what concerns me, I think these verses charming.

If purgatives produce such good verses, I might as well take a dose of senna, to see if it would work with me. Listen; I have a whim to see you; it would be treason if you do not lend yourself to gratify this fancy. I want to study with you; I have leisure this year, and God knows if I shall have any again. But, in order that you may not suppose you are going to Lapland I will send you a dozen certificates from which you will learn that this climate is not wholly disagreeable.

Madame du Châtelet will be delivered in September; you are not a midwife; she can have her child perfectly well without you; and if necessary you can then be back in Paris. Remember that the favours we do people without being urged are more agreeable and of a better grace than when we let ourselves be so much importuned.

If I scold you, it is only the custom of the gouty. You will do what you please; but I shall not be duped and I shall see whether you really care for me or whether all you say to me is simply the verbiage of a tragedy.

XCV

From Voltaire

Cirey, 29th June, 1749

Neither M. Bartenstein nor M. Bestushew, all powerful as they are, nor even Frederick the Great,

before whom they tremble, can prevent me from carrying out a duty I consider indispensable. I am neither a maker of children nor a doctor nor a midwife, but I am a friend, and even for your Majesty's sake I will not leave a woman who may die in September. Her lying-in has every appearance of being very dangerous; but if she escapes I promise you, Sire, that I will come and pay you my court in October. I still hold to my old maxim that when you command a soul and that soul says to its body: "Walk", that soul must go, however weak and frail it may be. In a word, Sire, well or ill, I am arranging to leave in October and to arrive wrapt up in furs before the Solomon of the north, flattering myself that in such weather you will not be besieging St. Petersburg, that you will love poetry, and that you will give me your orders. I give thanks to Providence that it has not taken me from this world before I have thrown myself at your feet.

XCVI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Sans Souci, 15th July, 1749

I wish nobody but you for my master in everything regarding language, taste and the department of Parnassus. Everyone must attend to his own occupation. When Marshal Belle-Isle trifles with the purity of language, Brühl will give military lessons and will write commentaries on the great Turenne's campaigns,

and I will compose a treatise on the truth of the Christian religion.

You, my dear Voltaire, are like the bad Christian; you put off your conversion from day to day. After having given me hopes for the summer, you put me off to the winter. Apparently Apollo, as god of medecine, orders you to preside over the lying-in of Madame du Châtelet. The sacred name of friendship imposes silence on me and I am content with what I am promised.

I have seen here the hero of France, the Saxon, that Turenne of the age of Louis XV. I have gained instruction from his talk, not in French, but in the art of war. The Marshal might be the professor of all the generals in Europe. He went to our plays; he told me that you have a new comedy on the stage and that *Nanine* had been very successful. I was surprised to learn that works of yours whose very names I did not know had appeared. There was a time when I saw them in manuscript, now I hear from others what is said of them and only receive them after the booksellers have published the second edition.

I will sacrifice all my complaints to you if you come here; if not, beware the epigram; chance might provide me with a good one. A poet, however bad he may be, is an animal who must be placated.

Good-bye; I await the fall of the leaves with as much impatience as we await their budding in the spring.

XCVII

From Voltaire

Lunéville, 31st August, 1749

Sire,

I have the happiness to receive your letter dated from your Tusculum of Sans Souci, from the Linterne of Scipio. I am greatly consoled to know that my death agony amuses you. This is my swan-song; I am making my last efforts. I have finished the complete sketch of *Catilina*, the first fruits of which your Majesty saw in the first act. Since then I have begun the tragedy of *Electre*, which I should like to come and finish at once at Sans Souci. I have also several little plans in my head for giving our language more energy and strength, and I think that if your Majesty would help me, we might give an alms to the French language, that prim, disdainful wench who takes pleasure in her indigence.

Madame du Châtelet is not yet delivered; it gives her more trouble to produce a child than a book. With us poets, Sire, our deliveries are the more difficult in proportion to our wish to do well. Didactic poems especially are much more difficult to write than others. A fine matter for discussion, when I am at your feet!

Another matter. My dear Isaac Onitz, your Majesty's most amiable chamberlain, whom I love with all my heart, has been pleased to print that I am most unpopular at your court. I do not know on what this is founded, but the thing is set down, and I

forgive it with all my heart in a man whom I consider the best creature in the world. But, Sire, if the Pope's Kappel-Meister had written that I was out of favour with the Pope I should ask agnuses and benedictions from his Holiness. Your Majesty has been graciously pleased to send me the pills, which have done me a great deal of good; 'tis a great point; but if you will be graciously pleased to send me half an ell of black ribbon, it would be of much more use to me than a scapulary. The king with whom I am cannot prevent me from coming to thank you. No one will be able to detain me. Assuredly, there is no need to hold me in leash by your favours; and I swear I will come to your Majesty's feet without either string or ribbon. But I can assure your Majesty that the sovereign of Lunéville needs this pretext to prevent him from being angry with me for this journey. He has made a kind of bargain with Madame du Châtelet, and I am one of the clauses of the bargain. I am lodged in his house, and however free an animal of my sort may be, he owes something to his master's father-in-law. These are my reasons, Sire: I will add that I was tenderly attached to you before any of those whom you have overwhelmed with favours were known to your Majesty, and I ask of you a sign which will show Lunéville and all I meet on the road to Berlin that you are graciously pleased to befriend me. Allow me also to say that the post I hold near the king my master, being an ancient office of the Crown which gives the right of the oldest nobility, is not only perfectly compatible with the honour I request but renders

me most eligible for it. In short, it is the Order of Merit and I desire to hold my merit from your favours. In any case, I shall leave in October; and whether I have any merit or not I shall be at your feet.

XCVIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 4th September, 1749

Your letter is charming; you are the only person who can write such letters. It seems as if France is condemned to bury with you ten persons of wit born in different ages.

Since Madame du Châtelet writes books, I do not think she will produce her child in a moment of distraction. Tell her to hurry up, for I am eager to see you. I feel my extreme need of you and the great aid you may be to me. The passion for study will last all my life; in that respect I agree with Cicero and with what I say in one of my epistles. With application I can acquire all sorts of knowledge; I wish to owe my knowledge of the French language to you. I correct myself as much as my acquirements permit; but I have no purist sufficiently severe to point out all my faults. In short, I am expecting you and preparing a reception for the gentleman in ordinary and the genius in extraordinary.

In Paris they say you will not come, and I say you will, for you are not a liar; and if they accuse you of

being indiscreet, I should say that it is possible; that you allow yourself to be robbed, and I should acquiesce; that you are coquettish, still more. You are like the white elephant for which the king of Persia and the grand Mogul go to war, and with which they augment their titles when they are happy enough to possess it. Good-bye. If you come here, you will see mine are Frederick by the Grace of God, King of Prussia, Elector of Brandenburg, Possessor of Voltaire, etc.

XCIX

From Voltaire

Paris, 15th October, 1749

Sire,

I have just made an effort in my present dreadful state of mind to write to M. d'Argens; I will make another to throw myself at your Majesty's feet.

I have lost one who was my friend for twenty-five years, a great man, whose only defect was being a woman, whom all Paris regrets and honours. She did not perhaps receive justice during her life, and you perhaps have not judged her as you would have done, if she had had the honour to be known to your Majesty. But a woman who could translate Newton and Virgil, and who had all the virtues of a man of honour, will no doubt have a share in your regret.

The state I have been in for the last month hardly leaves me a hope of ever seeing you; but I will tell

you boldly that if you knew my heart better you might also have the goodness to regret a man who has loved in your Majesty nothing but your person.

Sire, you are a very great king; you dictated peace in Dresden; your name will be great throughout all ages; but all your fame and all your power do not give you the right to distress a heart wholly devoted to you. Were I as well as I am ill, were I but ten leagues from your dominions, I would not stir a foot to visit the court of a great man who did not love me and who only sent for me as a sovereign. But if you knew me, if you had a true kindness for me, I would go to Pekin to throw myself at your feet. I am a man of sensibility, Sire, and nothing but that. I have perhaps only two days left to live, I shall spend them in admiring you but in deploring the injustice you do a soul which was so devoted to yours, and which still loves you as M. de Fénelon loved God—for his own sake. God should not scorn one who offers so rare an incense.

Continue to believe, if you please, that I have no need of petty vanities and that I seek you alone.

C

From Voltaire

Paris, 10th November, 1749

Sire,

I received almost at the same time three letters from your Majesty; one dated the 10th September,

via Frankfort, forwarded from Frankfort to Lunéville, sent on to Paris, to Cirey, back to Lunéville and again to Paris, while I was in the country in the most complete retirement; the two others reached me the day before yesterday by the offices of M. Chambrier, who is still I think at Fontainebleau. Alas! Sire, if the first of these letters had reached me in the crisis of my grief, at the time when I ought to have received it, I should only have left that disastrous Lorraine for you; I should have left it to throw myself at your feet; I should have come to hide myself in some corner of Potsdam or Sans Souci; half dead as I was, I should certainly have made this journey; I should have found the strength for it. I should even have had reasons which you may guess, for preferring to die in your dominions rather than in the country where I was born.

What has happened? Your silence made me think that my request had displeased you; that you had really no feeling of kindness towards me; that you took what I proposed as a subterfuge and a determined wish to remain near King Stanislas. His Court, where I saw Mme du Châtelet die in a way a hundred times more dreadful than you can believe, became for me a horrible dwelling-place, in spite of my tender attachment for that good prince and in spite of his extreme kindness. I therefore returned to Paris; I collected my family about me, I took a house, I found myself the father of a family without having any children. Thus in my grief I have made myself a quiet and honourable establishment, and I am

passing the winter in these arrangements and in my business affairs which were mixed up with those of her whom death should not have carried off before me. But, since you are ſtill graciously pleased to love me a little, your Majeſty may be very sure that I shall come and throw myself at your feet next summer, if I am ſtill alive. I now need no pretext, I need only the continuation of your kindness. I shall spend a week with King Stanislas, a duty I muſt fulfil; and the reſt shall be for your Majeſty.

I beg you will be convinced that I only thought of that black rag because at that time King Stanislas would not have allowed me to leave him. I thought you had conferred that favour upon M. de Maupertuis. I expect new presents from your pen, and I flatter myself that the cargo you will receive immediately from me will bring me one from you. I shall have the honour to continue this little commerce during the winter; and with due reſpect, Sire, I think that you and I are the only two merchants of that sort in Europe. I shall then come to look over your accounts, to expatiate, to talk of grammar and poetry; I shall bring you Madame du Châtelet's analytical grammar and as much as I can collect of her Virgil; in a word, I shall come with full pockets and I shall find your portfolios well furnished. I have a delicious expectation of these moments; but it is on the express condition that you are graciously pleased to love me a little, for otherwise I shall die at Paris.

CI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

25th November, 1749

Do not tease me any more with " what people say." " What people say " is the fools' gazette. Nobody has spoken ill of you in this country. I have forgotten in which of his books d'Argens prattles about Euripides; who told you he meant you ? If he had meant you, would he not have chosen Virgil rather than Euripides ? Everybody would have recognised you in that ſtroke; in the passage you quote to me I see no relation to the reception given you here.

Do not invent monſters to fight; skirmish, if you muſt, with the real enemies your merit has made you in France, and do not imagine you find them where there are none; or, if you enjoy bickerings, do not bring me into them; I do not underſtand them and never wish to.

I can see from the arrangements you have made how little hope I have of seeing you. You will never lack excuses; an imagination as keen as yours is inexhauſtible. At one time it will be a new tragedy whose success you will wish to see, at another time domeſtic arrangements; or else King Stanislas, or fresh examples of " what people say." In short, I am more incredulous about this journey than about the arrival of the Messiah, whom the Jews ſtill expect.

I await with impatience the large parcel you promise me and I shall admire you, though you are both ungrateful and absent, because I shall not be able to prevent it.

Good-bye; I must go and witness the pleasant follies of Roland and the heroic stupidities of Coriolanus. I wish you tranquillity, joy, and long life.

CII

From Voltaire

Paris, 17th March, 1750

So d'Arnaud is at your feet! Who now will have the happiness of sending your Majesty the new books and new follies of our country? I am told that a certain Fréron has been proposed. I beg I may be allowed to point out to your Majesty that for such a correspondent you must have men who possess the approbation of the public. Fréron is very far from being considered worthy of such an honour. He is a man fallen into general discredit and contempt, having just come out of prison where he was placed for somewhat infamous matters. Moreover, I will confess, Sire, that he is my declared enemy and that he inveighs against me in his paltry periodical sheets, solely because I would not be so base as to give him two louis which he was base enough to ask from my servants to praise my works. I certainly do not think

your Majesty can choose such a man. If you will be graciously pleased to rely upon me, I will provide you with one who will not displease you; if you wish, I myself will undertake to send you anything you command me. My ill health, which very often prevents me from writing with my own hand, will not prevent me from dictating news. In a word, I am at your orders for the remainder of my life.

CIII

From Voltaire

Paris, 8th May, 1750

Yes, Sire, you will see an invalid, a victim of melancholy, to whom your Majesty will give much pleasure but who will give you none; my imagination will enjoy yours. Be so good as to expect to give all and to receive nothing. I am really in a very pitiable state; d'Arnaud can give you an account of me.

But you know I would a hundred times rather die near you than elsewhere. There is still one more difficulty; I am speaking, not to the king, but to the man who can enter into the details of human misery. I am rich, very rich for a man of letters. I have, as they say in Paris, set up a house where I live as a philosopher with my family and my friends. Such is my situation; in spite of that, it is at present impossible

for me to make any extraordinary expense; first, because it has cost me a great deal to set up my little home; and second, because Mme du Châtelet's affairs, mixed up with my own fortune, have cost me still more. I beg that in accordance with your philosophical custom you will set the Majesty aside and allow me to say that I will not be an expense to you. I cannot have a good travelling carriage nor leave with the comforts necessary to a sick man, nor provide for home during my absence, etc., for less than four thousand German crowns. If Mettra, one of the corresponding traders of Berlin, will advance them to me, I will execute a bond and will re-pay him from that portion of my most available property which is now being liquidated. Perhaps this is a ridiculous thing to propose; but I can assure your Majesty that this arrangement will not inconvenience me. You have only to say a word, Sire, to Mettra's correspondent in Berlin or to the correspondent of some other banker living in Paris; it can be concluded on receipt of the letter and four days afterwards I will set out. However much my body may suffer, my soul will urge it onwards; and that soul which is yours will be happy. I have spoken openly to you and I beg the philosopher to tell that monarch not to be angry. In a word, I am ready; and if you are graciously pleased to love me, I will leave all, I will set out, and I should like to set out to spend my life at your feet.

CIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 24th May, 1750

Pour une brillante beauté,
Qui tentait son désir lubrique,
Jupiter avec dignité
Sut faire l'amant magnifique.
L'or plut, et son pouvoir magique
De cette amante trop pudique
Fléchit l'austère cruauté.

Ah! si, dans sa gloire éternelle,
Ce dieu si galant s'attendrit
Sur les appas d'une mortelle
Stupide, sans talents, mais belle,
Qu'aurait-il fait pour votre esprit? . . .

Pour moi, qui n'ai point l'honneur d'être
L'image de ce dieu puissant,
Je veux dans ce séjour champêtre
Vous en procurer tout autant;
Je veux imiter cette pluie
Que sur Danaé son galant
Répandit très-abondamment;
Car de votre puissant génie
Je me suis déclaré l'amant.[1]

[1] For the sake of a brilliant beauty, who tempted his lascivious desires, Jupiter played the magnificent lover with dignity. Gold showered down and his magic power subdued the austere cruelty of

But, since Mettra might repudiate a letter of credit in verse, I am sending by his correspondent one in due form which will be worth more than my prattling. You are like Horace, you like to mix the useful with the agreeable; for my part, I think pleasure cannot be purchased too dearly and I feel I have made a very good bargain with Mettra. I will pay the rate of wit in proportion as the exchange rises. It is necessary in society; I like it; and it would be impossible to find better than that in Mettra's shop.

I must warn you that I am leaving for Prussia, that I shall not be back here before the 22nd June and that you will do me great pleasure to come here about that time. You will be received as the Virgil of this age; and the gentleman in ordinary to Louis XV will give place, if you please, to the great poet. Good-bye; may the rapid coursers of Achilles bring you, hilly roads flatten themselves before you! May the German inns change into palaces to receive you! May the winds of Aeolus be imprisoned in the vessels of Ulysses, may rainy Orion disappear, and our vegetable-garden Nymphs be changed into goddesses, so that your journey and your reception may be worthy of the author of the *Henriade!*

this over-modest mistress. Ah! if, in his eternal glory, this gallant god grew tender for the charms of a stupid mortal, without talents but fair, what would he have done for your wit?

For my part, I have not the honour to be the image of that powerful god; I wish to procure you as much in this rural retreat; I wish to imitate that rain which the gallant poured so abundantly upon Danae; for I declare myself the lover of your powerful genius.

CV

From Voltaire

Paris, 9th June, 1750

I cannot be in your Heaven, Sire, before the first days of July. Be sure I will do all I can to arrive at the end of June. But old Danäe is too experienced to promise lightly; and although her spirit is very keen and very impatient, years have taught her to moderate her ardours. I have just written M. de Räsfeldt that at the latest I shall reach your States of Clèves in the first days of July, and I am begging him to remember the *vorspann*. I make the same request to you, Sire. Hold splendid reviews in your northern kingdoms; impress the Russian Empire; be the arbiter of peace, and return to preside over your Parnassus. You are the man of all times and of all places and of all talents. Receive me into the ranks of your adorers; I have no merit save that I was the first. The title of Dean of that chapter cannot be refused me. I will take the liberty of saying to your Majesty what La Fontaine, at my age, said of women: "I do not give them much pleasure, but they still give me a great deal."

CVI

From Voltaire

Compiègne, 26th June, 1750

I am at Compiègne, Sire, only to ask the greatest king of the south for permission to come and throw myself at the feet of the greatest king of the north; and the days I shall spend with Frederick the Great will be the fairest of my life. I leave Compiègne the day after to-morrow. I am precise; I count the hours which will be long between Compiègne and Sans Souci. A hundred thousand fools have been to Rome this year; if they had been men, they would have come to see your miracles.

Clèves, 2nd July

Sire, I sent my letter to your Chancellor at Clèves, and I have reached here as soon as the letter; I reopen it to thank your Majesty again. I arrived here in very bad health. In truth, I go to your court as sick persons in antiquity went to the Temple of Aesculapius.

I fly; Sire, I shall arrive dead or alive. I leave here on the fifth; my miserable state of health and still more my broken carriage detain me here for three days.

I beg your Majesty to have the kindness to send an order for the *vorspann* to the commander of

Lippstadt, and to be graciously pleased to recommend me to him. It is a dreadful thing for a sick Frenchman, who has only French servants, to travel post in Germany. Erasmus complained of this two hundred years ago. Have pity on your wandering sick man.

I re-seal my letter, and reiterate my profound respect to your Majesty and my passion to see that great man once more.

CVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 23rd August, 1750

I have seen the letter your niece writes you from Paris; her love for you brings her my esteem. If I were Mme Denis I should think in the same way. But being what I am, I think otherwise. I should be in despair if I caused the unhappiness of my enemy, how then could I desire the misfortune of a man whom I love, whom I esteem, and who sacrifices for me his country and all that is dearest to humanity? No, my dear Voltaire, if I could foresee that your transplantation might in the very least turn to your disadvantage, I should be the first to dissuade you. Yes, I should prefer your happiness to the extreme pleasure I take in seeing you. But you are a philosopher, and so am I; what can be more natural, more simple, more in the nature of things than that

philosophers created to live together, united by the same ſtudies, by the same taſtes, by a similar way of thinking, should enjoy that satisfaction? I reſpect you as my maſter in eloquence and knowledge; I love you as a virtuous friend. What slavery, what misfortune, what change, what inconſtancy of fortune is there to fear in a country where you are eſteemed as much as in your own land, and in the house of a friend who bears a grateful heart? I am not so madly presumptuous as to think that Berlin equals Paris. If riches, grandeur and magnificence make an agreeable town, we muſt yield to Paris. If good taſte, which is perhaps more widely dispersed, is to be found in one place in the world, I know and I admit that it is in Paris. But do you not take that taſte with you wherever you are? We have organs which suffice to applaud you and, in sentiment, we yield to no country in the world. I reſpected the friendship which bound you to Madame du Châtelet; but after her I am one of your oldeſt friends. What! because you retire to my house, shall it be said that this house is become your prison? What! because I am your friend, am I your tyrant? I confess I do not underſtand this logic; that I am firmly persuaded you will be very happy here so long as I live, that you will be regarded as the father of letters and of men of taſte and that you will find in me all the consolations a man of your merit can expect from someone who eſteems him. Good-night.

CVIII

From Voltaire

February, 1751

Well, Sire, your Majesty is right, perfectly right and I, at my age, am almost irreparably wrong. I have never been able to wean myself from the accursed idea of going straight forward in all affairs; and, although I am quite convinced there are a thousand occasions when one must be content to lose and be silent, although I have had experience of them, I was mad to prove that I was right in regard to a man with whom one should not even be right. Be sure I am in despair and that I have never felt so deep and so bitter a grief. In the carelessness of my heart, I have deprived myself of the only object for which I came here; I have lost the conferences which enlightened and animated me, I have displeased[1] the only man I wished to please. If the Queen of Sheba had been in disgrace with Solomon she would not have suffered more than I. I can reply to the Solomon of to-day that all his genius cannot make me feel my error as much as my heart makes me feel it. I am cruelly ill; but my illness does not approach my affliction, and that affliction is only equal to the tender and respectful attachment which will only end with my life.

[1] Voltaire had received orders not to appear in Frederick's presence until his law-suit was decided.

CIX

From Voltaire

Berlin, February, 1751

Sire,

Your Majesty combines with your great talents that of understanding men. But, for my part, I do not understand how it is that in my retreat (royal indeed, but still more philosophic), where there is nothing to dispute, where peace should find a dwelling-place, the devil can yet sow his discords. Why was d'Arnaud stirred up against me? Why was he made malevolent? Why was my secretary corrupted? Why am I attacked in your presence by the basest reports and the vilest details? Why were you told on the 29th November that I had bought eighty thousand crowns worth of bank-notes, when I never had a single one and when having been publicly solicited by the Jew Hirschel to take them like other people, and having consulted Kircheisen on the nature of these securities, I had revoked my bills of exchange on the 24th November and had forbidden Hirschel to buy a single note on my account? Why did someone dictate to Hirschel a letter of calumny addressed to your Majesty, every point of which has been recognised as a lie by an authentic judgment? Why has someone dared to tell your Majesty that the necessary arrest of this Jew, a perfectly legal arrest without which I should have lost ten thousand livres in bills of exchange, was an illegal arrest? Pardon, Sire;

suffer your great heart to allow me to continue. Why persecute an unhappy foreigner, a sick man, a solitary, who is here only for your sake, with whom you take the place of the whole earth, who has renounced everything to listen to you and to read you, whose heart alone led him to your feet, who has never said a single word that can wound anybody, and who, in spite of what he has undergone, will complain of nobody? Why were these persecutions predicted to me, predictions you yourself have read, which your kindness promised to thwart and to render helpless? Why has d'Argens been forced to leave? Why am I so cruelly attacked? This, I swear, is a problem I cannot solve. The law-suit I have had, which I have won on every point—did I not try every means of avoiding it? I was compelled to undertake it; otherwise I should have been robbed of thirteen thousand crowns; while for the last eight months I have had the expense of a large house in Paris and owing to the disorder in which I left my affairs, meaning to pass two months at your feet, I have endured without mentioning it the confiscation of all my revenues in Paris for five months. Nevertheless I am represented to your Majesty as a man basely self-interested. That is why I beg Darget to throw himself at your feet, Sire, begging you to suppress my pension; not assuredly to reject your benefits which deeply move me, but to convince your Majesty that you are my sole object. Did I come here to seek pomp, grandeur, credit? I wished to live in solitude, to admire sometimes your person and your works, to labour, to endure patiently

the ills to which nature condemns me and to wait quietly for death. That is what I still desire. I shall not be more solitary near Potsdam than in your palace at Berlin. If Darget has spoken to you of the prayers I dared to make you for this arrangement, I beg you to forget them, Sire, and to forgive me the propositions I hazarded. I shall live perfectly well at Potsdam with what your Majesty is graciously pleased to grant me. I shall stay there, at your Majesty's pleasure, until the spring, when I will take a turn in Paris to bring my affairs to some permanent order. I dare to flatter myself that the assurance of not displeasing a great man for whom alone I live, I feel and I think, will assuage the illness which torments me, which demands rest and peace of mind above everything; without which life is a torment. Permit me then, Sire, to settle at Marquisat until the spring; I will go there in a few days, as soon as the dregs of the law-suit are drunk and all is over. This is the grace I beg your Majesty to be graciously pleased to grant a man who desires to spend at your feet the few days which remain to him.

CX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 24th February, 1751

I was glad to receive you into my house; I esteemed your wit, your talents, your knowledge, and I thought

a man of your age weary of skirmishing with authors and of exposing himself to disturbances, came here to take refuge in a quiet port; but first of all in a very curious way you exacted that I should not take Fréron to write me news. I had the weakness or complaisance to grant you this, although it was not for you to decide whom I should take into my service. D'Arnaud did you some wrong; a generous man would have forgiven him; a vindictive man pursues those he hates. In short, although d'Arnaud did nothing to me, it is owing to you that he left here. You went to the Russian ambassador and talked of matters which did not concern you, and it was thought I ordered you to do so. You interfered in Mme de Bentinck's affairs, which were assuredly not in your department. Now you have the basest affair imaginable with a Jew. You have made a dreadful noise through the whole town. The affair of the Saxony notes is so well known in Saxony that I have received serious complaints. For my part, I maintained order in my household until your arrival; and I warn you that if you have a passion for intrigue and cabal, you have come to the wrong place. I like quiet and peaceable people who do not put into their conduct the violent passions of a tragedy; if you can make up your mind to live as a philosopher, I shall be glad to see you; but if you yield to all the fury of your passions and bear malice against everyone, you will do me no pleasure by coming here and you may as well stay in Berlin.

CXI

From Voltaire

Berlin, 27th February, 1751

Sire,

All things duly considered, I made a bad mistake in having a law-suit with a Jew, and I ask pardon of your Majesty, of your philosophy and your favour. I was piqued, I was eager to prove that I had been deceived. I proved it, and after having won this unhappy law-suit, I gave that accursed Hebrew more than I had offered him at first to take back his accursed diamonds, which are unsuitable to a man of letters. All this does not prevent me from having consecrated my life to you. Do with me as you will. I have informed her Royal Highness, the Margravine of Bayreuth that brother Voltaire was in a state of penitence. Have pity on brother Voltaire. He only awaits the moment to hide himself in the cell at Marquisat. Be sure, Sire, that brother Voltaire is a good man, that he is at enmity with no one, and above all that he takes the liberty to love your Majesty with all his heart. To whom will you show the fruits of your great genius except to your old admirer? He has no longer any talent, but he has taste, he feels keenly, and your imagination was made for his soul. He is all compact of weaknesses, but his greatest weakness is for you. He is not self-interested as you have been told and he seeks in your Majesty only

yourself. He is very ill, but your favours will perhaps restore him to health; in a word, his life is in your hands.

V.

I learn that your Majesty will permit me to retire to Marquisat for the spring. I give you my most humble thanks. You are the consolation of my life.

CXII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 28th February, 1751

If you wish to come here, you may do so. I hear nothing of any law-suit here, not even of yours. Since you have won it, I congratulate you, and am very glad the affair is over. I hope you will have no more quarrels with the old or the new Testament; such compromises are most damaging, and the talents of the finest mind in France will not hide the stains which your conduct will finally imprint on your reputation. A bookseller Gosse,[1] a violin player of the Opera, a Jew goldsmith, are indeed people whose names should never be found beside yours in any affair. I write this letter with the gross common sense of a German who says what he thinks, without employing equivocal terms and flabby modifications which disfigure the truth; 'tis for you to profit by it.

[1] Jore.

CXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

May, 1751

I have just been delivered of six twins who ask to be baptised in the name of Apollo in the waters of Hippocrine. *La Henriade* is requested to act as godmother; you will have the goodness to bring her this evening at five o'clock to the father's apartment. Darget-Lucina will be there and the imagination of the Man-Machine[1] will hold the new born babes at the font.

CXIV

From Voltaire

From what is called the Marquisat, 5th June, 1751

I am sending your Majesty a dialogue about Marcus Aurelius. I have tried to write it in the manner of Lucian. Lucian is natural, he makes his readers think, and one is always tempted to add to his dialogues. He does not try to be witty. The defect of Fontenelle is that he always tries to be witty; we always see him and never his heroes; he makes them say the contrary of what they ought to say; he supports the pro and the con; he only wishes to shine. It is true he succeeds; but it seems to me that he grows wearisome

[1] La Mettrie.

in the end, because we feel there is hardly anything true in all he presents. We perceive the charlatan's touch and it repels. In that work Fontenelle seems to me the most delightful juggler who has ever been seen. That after all is something and it amuses.

I enclose with Marcus Aurelius two odds and ends which your Majesty perhaps has not seen, because they were printed at the end of a dull book about the square of distances, which is not in the least amusing.

But in reward for the rags I send, I expect the sixth canto of your art; I expect the roof of the Temple of Mars. You alone are worthy to build this Temple, as Ovid was to sing of Love and Horace to give the art of poetry.

CXV

From Voltaire

August, 1751[1]

But, Sire, your Majesty has not read the letter and verses by the Chevalier de Quinsonas; for all was sealed with his seal. Some of the verses were well written; but it is difficult to give a work that piquant turn which forces people to read in spite of themselves.

What a chevalier! He seems the universe. His poem might extend to two or three thousand cantos. It seems he wishes to be the knight of truth. You encourage liberty of thought on all sides, and you will create an age of philosophy.

[1] There is some doubt about the date of this letter.

It was this Chevalier de Quinsonas who sounded Lady Wortley Montague's nature.

Be graciously pleased, Sire, to receive your invalid's profound respect and his regret that yesterday he could not approach him whom Quinsonas admires and invokes.

CXVI

From Voltaire

September, 1751[1]

Sire,

If you love free criticism, if you permit sincere eulogies, if you would perfect a work which you alone in Europe are capable of doing, your Majesty has only to order the solitary to come up.

The solitary is at your Majesty's orders for life.

CXVII

From Voltaire

Berlin, 14*th October*, 1751[2]

Abraham Hirschell has just played the Margrave Henry the same trick that he played me. Forgive me, Sire, but I still have that affair on my heart, and I should die of grief without your favours.

[1] Also dated Sept.-Oct. (1750). [2] Also dated 14th July (1751).

CXVIII

From Voltaire

30th January, 1752

Sire,

As to Pascal, I beg you to read page 274 of the second volume which I have the honour to send your Majesty, and you shall judge whether his cause is just.

As for Mme de Bentinck, she has no kitchen and I have one here and one in Paris. As to law-suits and discords, I have none except with the illness which is carrying me to the grave.

I live in the greatest solitude and the greatest pain, and I beg your Majesty not to break the fragile reed you brought from so far.

M. de Bielfeld restored long ago the copies your printer gave to a professor at Frankfort on the Oder. Naturally I was distressed that anyone should have them before your Majesty. That is the whole law-suit and the whole disorder.

Is it possible that calumny can have gone to the extent of accusing me of some ill action in this affair? I cannot understand it. The work is mine as the history of Brandenburg is your Majesty's, if you will allow me the insolence of a comparison. What quarrel, what discussion, can I have about something which belongs to me and which is in my hands? What will become of me, Sire, if so improbable a calumny is believed? Frankness, which characterises the

capital of France and me, deserves that you should be graciously pleased to inform me of my fault if I have committed one; and if I have not done so, I ask justice from your heart.

You know a word from your mouth is a mortal wound. Everyone about the Queen Mother says I am in your disgrace. Such a state discourages and withers the soul, and the fear of displeasing takes away all means of giving pleasure. Be graciously pleased to reassure me against my self-mistrust, and at least have pity on me whom you have promised to make happy.

CXIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

March, 1752[1]

I expected from day to day that you would come here, which has prevented my thanking you earlier for the history of Louis XIV. To follow the art with which you have made this extract, I read the first part with the beginning of Quincy, that dictionary of battles and sieges; and I await your return to give you my opinion. My impatience made me read the second volume at the same time; and, to tell you the truth, I think it superior to the first both from the subject and the style and from that noble boldness with which you speak the truth even to kings. 'Tis a very fine piece, and does you infinite honour.

[1] Also February (1752).

The death of Mme Henriette will cause your *Rome Sauvée* to be played later than you thought.

I have been ill for a week with a cold on the chest and a fever in the blood; but it is almost over now. I do nothing but read and have ceased to write; when one's memory is as bad as mine, it is necessary to re-read from time to time to regain the impression and to find out what is worth the trouble. After that I shall begin again to correct my wretched pieces. Your fire is like that of the Vestals; it never goes out; the little that fell to my share must be frequently stirred and even then is often nearly quenched under ashes. Good-bye; do not think there are more oaks than reeds in this world; you will see many people die beside you, and you will surpass still more by your name, which will never perish.

CXX

From Voltaire

Potsdam, 5th September, 1752

Sire,

Your pedant in full stops and commas, and your disciple in philosophy and in morals, has profited by your lessons and lays at your feet the *Natural Religion*, the only one worthy of a thinking being. You will find the work stronger and more in accordance with your views. I have followed your advice; anyone who writes must do so. Happy are they who can have such advice as yours! If your battalions and your

squadrons leave you any leisure, I beg your Majesty to be graciously pleased to read this work carefully, for it is partly an exposition of your ideas and partly an exposition of the examples you give the world. 'Tis to be wished that these opinions may spread more and more in the world. But how many men do not deserve to be enlightened!

I add to this parcel the books just printed in Holland. Your Majesty will perhaps be glad to re-read the *Éloge de La Mettrie*. This *Éloge* is more philosophical than everything that mad philosopher ever wrote. The graces and lightness of style in this *Éloge* continually adorn Reason. It is not so with the heavy letter by Haller, who has been stupid enough to mistake a jest for earnest. The grave reply of Maupertuis was not what was needed. This was a case for imitating Swift who persuaded the astrologer Partridge that he was dead. To persuade an old doctor that he had given lessons in a bawdy-house would have been a most laughable jest.

We await your Majesty calmly at Potsdam. What should I do in Berlin? I did not come for Berlin, although it is a very fine town; but solely for you. I endure my illness as gaily as I can. D'Argens laughs and grows fat. Arius de Prades is a most amiable heresiarch. We live together praising God and your Majesty and hooting the Sorbonne. We have fine projects for the advancement of human reason.

CXXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

October, 1752[1]

If I had not had a terrible colic and a violent headache yesterday I should have thanked you at once for the new edition of your works I have received. I have skimmed through the new pieces you have added, but I do not like their arrangement nor the form of the edition. They look like Luther's psalms; and everything is mixed up. I think it would be convenient for the public to increase the number of volumes, to make the print larger, to place together those pieces which are related and to separate those which have no connection. These are my comments which I communicate to you; for I am quite convinced we have not reached the last edition of your works. You will kill your editors and your readers with your colics and your swoons, and after we are dead you will write panegyrics or satires on all those with whom you lived. This is the prophecy not of Nostradamus but of someone who has a little knowledge of diseases and whose profession is the knowledge of men. I am labouring in my den at less brilliant and less well-constructed things than those which occupy you, but they amuse me and that suffices. I hope to hear soon that you are well and in good humour.

[1] Also dated June (1752).

CXXII

From Voltaire

December, 1752[1]

Sire,

This morning I wrote a letter to the Abbé de Prades to be showed to your Majesty; since then he has had a copy of the edition of La Beaumelle, of which you had ordered him to give you an account. I immediately asked for my letter back, meaning to take the liberty of writing myself to your Majesty. But finding myself very ill, and being unable to write a detailed letter at this moment, I beg your Majesty to allow me to send you this morning's letter or rather memoir. I conjure you to allow a bad work which will fail of itself to perish, and have pity on the dreadful state to which it has reduced me.

CXXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

December, 1752

Your effrontery astounds me, after what you have just done, which is as clear as daylight, you persist instead of confessing yourself guilty! Do not imagine you will make me think that black is white; when a man does not see 'tis because he does not wish to see,

[1] Also dated January (1753).

but if you carry the matter to an end I will have everything printed and it will be seen that if your works deserve that statues should be erected to you, your conduct deserves chains.

The bookseller has been interrogated and has confessed everything.

CXXIV

From Voltaire

December, 1752

Ah! Heavens! Sire, in my state! I swear to you once more by my life, which I renounce without pain, that it is a terrible calumny. I beg you to confront me with all these people. What! Would you judge me without hearing me! I demand justice and death.

CXXV

From Voltaire

Berlin, 1st January, 1753

Sire,

It was only in the fear that I could no longer show myself in your Majesty's presence that I returned to your feet the favours which were not the bonds by which I was attached to your person. You may judge my dreadful situation and that of my whole family. Nothing remains for me but to go and hide myself forever and to deplore my misfortune in silence.

M. de Fredersdorff, who came to console me in my disgrace, gave me hopes that your Majesty would be graciously pleased to hearken to the kindness of your character in regard to me and that you might repair by your benevolence, if that be possible, the opprobrium with which you have covered me. It is most certain that the misfortune of having displeased you is not the least I suffer. But how can I appear? How live? I do not know. I ought to be dead of grief. In this horrible state it is for your Humanity to have pity on me. What do you expect me to become and to do? I do not know. I only know that you have attached me to you for sixteen years. Give your orders as to the disposal of a life which I consecrated to you and whose end you have made so bitter. You are kind, you are indulgent, I am the most unhappy man in your dominions; command my fate.[1]

[1] *Voltaire to Mme Denis*

Berlin, 13th January, 1753

I sent back the Solomon of the North for his New Year's present, the bells and fool's bauble he gave me, and you reproached me with so much. I wrote him a very respectful letter for I have asked leave to go. Do you know what he did? He sent his great factotum, Fredersdorff, who brought me back my baubles. He wrote me that he would rather live with me than with Maupertuis. What is most certain is that I do not want to live with either of them.

I know it is difficult to get away from here; but there are still hippogriffs to escape from Mme Alcine. I am absolutely determined to leave; that is all I can tell you, my dear child. I have been saying it for nearly three years and I ought to have done it. I told Fredersdorff that my health no longer allowed me to live in so dangerous a climate.

CXXVI

From Voltaire

Berlin, 12th March, 1753

Sire,

I have received a perfectly open letter from König; my heart is not less open. I think it my duty to send your Majesty a duplicate of my reply. I have so much confidence in your kindness and your justice, that I hide from you none of my movements. I will submit my conduct to you all my life, wherever I drag out my existence. It is true I am König's friend; but I am assuredly more attached to your Majesty than to him; and if he were capable of being wanting however slightly in what is due to you, I should break with him for ever.

Be certain, Sire, that I place my duty and my glory in being attached to you until my last moment. These feelings are as ineffaceable as my affliction, which increases daily.

I throw myself at your feet and await your Majesty's orders.

CXXVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

16th March, 1753

It was not necessary for you to make a pretext of the necessity you tell me you have for the Plombières

waters, in order to obtain leave to depart. You may leave my service when you wish; but before you go, return to me the contract of your engagement, the key, the cross, and the volume of poetry I confided to you. I could wish that my works alone had been exposed to your shafts and those of König. I sacrifice them gladly to those who think they increase their reputation by diminishing that of others. I have neither the folly nor the vanity of certain authors. The cabals of men of letters seem to me the disgrace of literature. However, I do not esteem any the less the honest men who cultivate letters. Only the leaders of cabals are degraded in my eyes.

Whereupon I pray God that He keep you in His holy and lofty guard.

CXXVIII

From Voltaire

Gotha, 28th April, 1753

Sire,

Is the news I see in the gazettes credible? Your Majesty's name is abused in order to poison the last days of a life I have consecrated to you. What! I am accused of having asserted that König wrote against your works! Ah! Sire, he is as incapable of it as I am. Your Majesty knows what I wrote to him about them. I have always told you the truth and shall always do so until the last moment of my life. I am in despair that I did not go to Bayreuth; part of my family, which will await me at the waters,

forces me to seek a cure which your favours alone could give me. I shall always be tenderly devoted to you, whatever you may do. I have never failed to, I will never fail to. I shall return to your feet in the month of October and if the unhappy adventure of La Beaumelle is not true, if Maupertuis indeed did not betray the secret of your suppers and did not calumniate me to excite La Beaumelle against me, if he, through his hatred, has not been the author of my misfortune, I will admit that I have been deceived and will ask his pardon before your Majesty and before the public; I should glory in doing so. But if La Beaumelle's letter is true, if the facts are proved, if I only took König's part, with all literary Europe, ask yourself, Sire, what the philosophers Marcus Aurelius and Julien would have done in a similar case.

We are all your servants and you could have reconciled everything with a word. You are made to be our judge, not our adversary. Your respectable pen would have been worthily employed in commanding us to forget everything; my heart warrants that I should have obeyed. Sire, that heart is still yours; you know that the enthusiasm which brought me to your feet, will bring me back again. When I besought your Majesty no longer to attach me to you by pensions, you know that it was solely preferring your person to your favours. You ordered me to receive these favours but I shall ever be attached to you for yourself alone; and I swear to you again, between the hands of her Royal Highness the Margravine of

Bayreuth, by whose means I take the liberty to send this letter, that I shall preserve even to the grave those feelings which led me to your feet when for your sake I left all that was dearest to me and when you were graciously pleased to swear eternal friendship to me.

CXXIX

From Mme Denis to Frederick II, King of Prussia (Dictated by Voltaire)

Frankfort, 21st June, in the morning, 1753

Sire,

I did not expect to have to implore for myself your Majesty's justice and fame. I have been forcibly carried away from my inn in your Majesty's name, led on foot through the populace by the assistant of the Sieur Freytag, your envoy, and imprisoned, with four soldiers at the door of my bedroom. I am even refused my waiting woman and my lackeys, and this assistant spends the whole night in my room.

This, Sire, is the pretext for this unheard-of violence, which certainly will excite your Majesty's pity and indignation as well as those of all Europe.

On the first of June, the Sieur Freytag demanded from my uncle your Majesty's printed book of poems, which your Majesty had been graciously pleased to bestow upon him, and confined him a prisoner until the day when the book should be returned, writing two notes in your name, in these terms:

"Monsir,

As soon as the large bale you say is at Hamburg or at Leipzig comes here, which contains the work of poetry the King demands, you can go wherever you think fit."

On this assurance from your envoy, my uncle caused the case to be returned with all possible diligence to the Sieur Freytag's address, and the book in question was delivered to him on the evening of the 17th June.

My uncle reasonably believed he had the right to set out on the 20th, leaving with your envoy the case and other valuable effects, which I expected to regain on the 21st; and on the 20th we were arrested in the most violent manner.

I who am only here to assist my dying uncle am treated as a woman guilty of the greatest crime; twelve soldiers are posted at our doors.

To-day, the 21st, the Sieur Freytag has just informed us that our imprisonment will cost us one hundred and twenty-eight crowns, forty-two kreutzers a day, and he has brought my uncle a paper to sign whereby my uncle must "keep silence as to all that has happened" (these are his own words), "and assert that the notes from the Sieur Freytag were only notes of consolation and friendship of no consequence."

He gives us hopes that he will remove our guard. This is the state we are in at two o'clock in the afternoon of the 21st of June.

I lack strength to say more; it suffices me to have informed your Majesty.

I am with respect your Majesty's most humble, and most obedient servant,

Denis, widow of the Sieur Denis, gentleman, formerly Captain in the regiment of Champagne, Quarter-Master and Pay-Master to his Majesty the King of France.

CXXX

From Voltaire

October, 1757

Sire,

Your Erfurt epistle[1] is filled with admirable and touching strokes. There will always be very fine things in what you do and in what you write. Permit me to tell you what I wrote to her Royal Highness, your noble sister; that this Epistle would make your readers shed tears if you did not speak of your own. But I am not to discuss with your Majesty what may perfect this monument of a great soul and a great genius; but rather yourself and the interest of all the sane portion of the human race whom philosophy attaches to your fame and to your preservation.

You wish to die; I will not speak to you here of

[1] Announcing Frederick's intention of committing suicide rather than survive the defeat of Prussia in the Seven Years' War.

the painful horror inspired in me by this design. I beseech you at least to suspect that from your high rank you can scarcely see what is men's opinion, what is the spirit of the time. As a king, it is not told you; as a philosopher and a great man you see only the examples of the great men of antiquity. You love glory, and to-day you place it in dying in a manner which men rarely choose and which none of the sovereigns of Europe has thought of since the fall of the Roman Empire. Alas! Sire, while loving glory so much how can you persist in a plan which will cause you to lose it? I have already represented to you the grief of your friends, the triumph of your enemies, and the insults of a certain kind of men who will basely make it a duty to degrade a generous action.

I must add, for this is a time to speak out, that nobody will look upon you as a martyr for *liberty*. We must be just; you know how many Courts persist in regarding your entrance into Saxony as an infringement of international law. What will be said in these Courts? That you have avenged this invasion upon yourself; that you could not resist the disappointment of not laying down the law. You will be accused of a premature despair when it is known that you took this disastrous resolution at Erfurt, when you were still master of Silesia and Saxony. Your epistle from Erfurt will be commented upon and criticised insultingly; this will be unjust but your name will suffer by it.

All that I point out to your Majesty is the

truth itself. He whom I have called the Solomon of the North says much more in the depths of his heart.

You feel indeed that if you choose this disastrous course you are seeking an honour which you will not enjoy. You feel that you do not wish to be humiliated by personal enemies; therefore the vanity of despair enters into this gloomy resolution. Let your superior reason plead against these sentiments; it tells you that you are not humiliated and that you cannot be; it tells you that, being a man like other men, whatever happens to you, you will retain all that could make other men happy, wealth, dignities, friends. A man who is only a *king* may think himself very unfortunate when he loses dominions; but a philosopher can do without dominions. Moreover, though I do not meddle with politics in any manner, I cannot believe but that sufficient dominions will always remain yours to make you a considerable sovereign. If you preferred to scorn all grandeur, like Charles V, Queen Christina, King Casimir and so many others, you could play the part better than all of them; and in you it would be a new grandeur. In short every course might be fitting except the odious and deplorable course you wish to take. Will it be worth while being a philosopher if you were unable to live as a private man, or if, while remaining a sovereign, you could not endure adversity?

In all that I say I have no interest save the public good and your own. I shall soon enter my sixty-fifth year; I was born sickly; I have but a moment to

live; I have been very unfortunate, as you know; but I shall die happy if I leave you on the earth putting into practice what you have so often written.

CXXXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Breslau, 16th January, 1758

I have received your letters of the 22nd November and the 2nd January. I have hardly time to write prose, much less verse, in answer to yours. I thank you for the interest you take in the fortunate chances which came to my aid at the end of a campaign where all seemed lost. Live happy and tranquil at Geneva; 'tis the one good thing in life; and send up your prayers for Europe to be cured soon of its hot fever of heroism, for the destruction of the triumvirate and for the tyrants of this universe to fail in placing the world in the chains they are preparing for it.

FÉDÉRIC

Oh Austrians! Your ambition, your desire to dominate everywhere, would soon raise you up other enemies; and the liberties of Germany and Europe will never lack defenders!

CXXXII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Rammenau, 2nd October, 1758

I am much obliged to the solitary of *Les Délices* for the interest he takes in the adventures of the Don Quixote of the North; the said Don Quixote leads the life of strolling players, playing sometimes at one theatre and sometimes at another, sometimes hissed, sometimes applauded. The last play he gave[1] was the Thébaïde; at the end there scarcely remained a candle-snuffer. I do not know what will be the result of all this; but I agree with our good Epicureans that those who remain in the audience are much happier than those on the stage. Although I am continually on the move, I hear odds and ends of what is going on in the republic of letters, and the hundred-mouthed babbler does not say what you are doing. I should like to shout in your ear: Brutus, thou sleepest. For three years there has appeared no new edition of your works; what can you be doing? If you have written anything new, I beg you will send it to me. For the rest, I wish you all the tranquillity and repose I do not enjoy myself.

[1] The battle of Zorndorf.

CXXXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Dresden, 6th December, 1758

You will easily have imagined my grief at this loss.[1] There are some misfortunes which can be repaired by conſtancy and a little courage; but there are others againſt which all the firmness one tries to employ as an armour and all the speeches of philosophers are but vain and useless aids. My unlucky ſtar overwhelms me with such misfortunes in the moſt embarrassing and moſt occupied moments of my life.

I have not been ill, as you were informed; my illness is only hemorrhoidal and sometimes nephretic colics. If it had depended upon me alone, I should gladly have devoted myself to death, which these sorts of accidents bring sooner or later, in order to save and to prolong the days of her who no longer sees the light. Never lose the memory of her and collect all your ſtrength, I beg you, to raise a monument in her honour. You have only to do her juſtice; and without departing from the truth you will find the fairest and moſt ample topics.

[1] The death of the Margravine of Bayreuth, his sister.

CXXXIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Breslau, 2nd March, 1759

Your letter contains a contradiction in terms and in facts. You say your imagination has failed and at the same time the whole of your letter is filled with it. You should have been more on your guard when you wrote to me and have suppressed that noble fire which still animates you at sixty-five. I fear you are in the category of most men, who concern themselves with the future and forget the past.

My verses are not made for the public. I have not enough imagination, I am not sufficiently a master of the language to write good verses; and mediocre verses are detestable to me. They are endured among friends and that is all. I send you poems in different *genres* which all taste of the same soil and show the time when they were written. Since you are now a rich and powerful lord, I am not afraid to make you pay the postage on my trifles, and so I am sending you at the same time all sorts of trumpery things which I have amused myself by writing at intervals.

I come to the matter which touches you most nearly, and I give you every assurance that I will think no more of the past and will give you satisfaction; but first of all suffer a man whom you have cruelly

persecuted[1] to die in peace, one who in all probability has only a few days to live.

CXXXV

From Voltaire

Aux Délices, 17th March, 1759

Sire,

I have received the letter written on the 2nd March with which your Majesty honours me. It appears that your Majesty had not then received the monument you desired me to raise with my weak hands to the memory of your adorable sister. I am risking another copy in this parcel; I recommend it to God, to the hussars, and to the curious who open letters. Your parcel which I received with your letter contained your *Ode to Prince Henry*, your *Epistle to my lord Marischal*, and your *Ode to Prince Ferdinand*. There is one passage in that Ode which only you could have written. To write thus it is not enough to have genius, one must be at the head of 150,000 men.

Your Majesty tells me in your letter that it appears I only desire the baubles of which you did me the honour to speak. It is true that after twenty years of attachment you might have refrained from depriving me of those signs of it which had no other value in my eyes but that conferred upon them by the hand which gave them. I could not even wear these marks

[1] Maupertuis.

of my long devotion to you during the war; my estates are in France. It is true they are on the frontier of Switzerland; it is true they are entirely free and that I pay nothing to France; but after all they are situated in France. I derive 60,000 livres of my income from France; my sovereign by letters patent has allowed me to retain my place of gentleman in ordinary of the chamber. Be certain that any marks of kindness and justice which you give me would only touch me because I have always looked upon you as a great man. You have never understood me.

I do not ask you for the trifles you think I desire so much; I do not want them; I only wanted your kindness. I have always told you the truth when I said I should wish to die near you.

Your Majesty treats me like everyone else; you rally me when you say the president is dying. The president has just had a law-suit at Basle with a girl who wished to be paid for a child she had had with him. I wish to Heaven I might have such a law-suit! I am a little far from that; I have been very ill, and I am very old. I admit I am very rich, very independent, very happy; but you are lacking to my happiness; and I shall soon die without having seen you. You will not care, and I try not to care. I like your verses, your prose, your wit, your bold and firm philosophy. I cannot live with you or without you. I am not speaking to the king, to the hero, who is the concern of sovereigns; I am speaking to him who enchanted me, whom I loved, and with whom I am still angry.

CXXXVI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Bolkenhayn, 11th April, 1759

It seems as if people have forgotten in this war all good behaviour and decorum. The most polite nations are fighting like wild beasts. I am ashamed of humanity; I blush for the age. Let us admit the truth; philosophy and the arts are only diffused among a few; the great mass, the people and the vulgar nobles, remain as nature made them, that is, malevolent animals.

CXXXVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Landeshut, 18th April, 1759

Your letters have reached me without having been opened by hussars, Frenchmen or other barbarians. A man can write what he wishes with impunity, without having 150,000 men, so long as he allows nothing to be printed. And people often print things more forcible than anything I have written or shall write, without the author's suffering the least trouble: for instance, your *Pucelle*. For my part, I only write for my own amusement.

I congratulate you on still being gentleman in ordinary to the *Bien-Aimé*. You will not be immortalised by his letters patent; you will owe your apotheosis

solely to *La Henriade*, *Oedipe*, *Brutus*, *Sémiramis*, *Mérope*, *the Comte de Foix*, etc, etc. They will make your reputation as long as there are men on the earth to cultivate letters, as long as there are persons of taste and admirers of the divine talent you possess.

For my part, in consideration of your genius, I pardon you all the annoyances you gave me in Berlin, all the libels of Leipzig, all the things you have said or printed against me, which are strong, harsh and numerous, without the least rancour.

It is not the same with my poor president, to whom you have taken such a dislike. I do not know whether he is making children or coughing out his lungs. However he cannot but be applauded if he is labouring at the propagation of the species when all the powers of Europe are making efforts to destroy it.

I am overwhelmed with affairs and arrangements. The campaign will open immediately. My part is the more difficult in that I must not make the least mistake and that I must act prudently and wisely for eight whole months of the year. I shall do what I can, but the task is very heavy.

CXXXVIII

From Voltaire

19*th May*, 1759

Sire,

You are as good a brother as you are a good general; but it is impossible for Tronchin to go to

the prince your brother at Schwedt. There are seven or eight persons from Paris, given up by the doctors as hopeless, who have been brought to Geneva or its neighbourhood, and who believe they only breathe so long as Tronchin does not leave them. Your Majesty may well suppose that among the number of these persons I do not count my poor niece who has languished for six years. Moreover, Tronchin overlooks the health of the children in the French royal family and sends his advice about them twice a week from Geneva; he cannot leave it; and he says that Prince Ferdinand's illness will be a long one. Perhaps it would be best if the patient undertook this journey, which in itself would contribute to his health by transferring him from a rather cold climate to a more temperate atmosphere. If he is unable to follow this course, the best thing to do is to inform Tronchin every week of his condition.

How could you have imagined that I could ever have allowed anyone to take a copy of the writing you addressed to the Prince of Brunswick? Certainly there are very beautiful things in it; but they are not of a kind to be showed to my nation. It would not be flattered by them; the king of France would be still less so, and I respect you both too much ever to allow anything to transpire which could only serve to make you irreconcilable. I have never desired anything but peace. I still possess a large part of the correspondence between the Margravine of Bayreuth and Cardinal Tencin, whose object was to procure some-

thing so necessary to a great part of Europe. I was the confidant of all the attempts made to arrive at so desirable an end; I have not abused and I will not abuse your confidence in the matter of a writing which tends to an absolutely contrary object. Be perfectly at rest on that score. My unhappy niece, who was terrified by this writing, burned it,[1] and the only vestige of it remains in my memory which retains three most beautiful strophes.

I am thunder-struck when you write me that I have said harsh things to you. For twenty years you were my idol. But your occupation as a hero and your rank as a king did not make your heart very tender; 'tis a pity, for that heart was made to be human, and but for heroism and the throne you would have been the most amiable of men in society.

But this is too much, if you are in the presence of the enemy, and too little if you are with yourself in the bosom of philosophy, which is worth more than glory.

You may be certain that I am still silly enough to love you, as I am sufficiently just to admire you; admit the frankness and receive with kindness the profound respect of the Swiss,

VOLTAIRE.

[1] This was not true.

CXXXIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Reich-Hennersdorf, 10th June, 1759

Learn that unless he whom you wot of returns to this earth to perform miracles, my brother will seek out no one. Thank God, he is still a great enough gentleman to procure and pay Swiss doctors; and you know that the Fredericks carry it over the Louis with doctors, poets, and sometimes even with philosophers who, preoccupied with vain speculations, do not reflect upon the moral part of their science. Your niece has ostentatiously displayed her zeal in favour of her nation; she burned me as I burned you in Berlin and as you have been burned in France. All you French are extravagant, when it is a question of the pre-eminence of their Kingdom; they love to let off a " King my master ", to affect the whims of old out-of-date ambassadors, and to espouse the cause of kings who do not honour them by condescending to know them; it is indeed a pity that your niece did not marry Mr. Prior; that would have created a fine race of politicians. For my part, I spare none of those who anger me, I bite them as hard as I can. In all probability we shall join battle in a few days and if fortune aids me a little, the sub-delegates of their imperial Majesties and the man with a sacred top-knot will be well thrashed; after that, what a consolation to jibe at them! As to you, who will not fight, for God's

sake do not jibe at anyone; be tranquil and happy, since you have no persecutors, and learn to enjoy without uneasiness a tranquillity you have obtained after having trotted for sixty years to obtain it. Good-bye, I wish you peace and safety. So be it.

FÉDÉRIC.

P.S. But are you wise at seventy? Learn at your age in what style you should write to me. Understand there are liberties permitted to, and impertinences intolerable in, wits and men of letters. Become a philosopher, that is to say, reasonable. Would that Heaven, which gave you so much wit, had given you judgment proportionately! If that happened, you would be the first man of the age, and perhaps the first the earth has ever produced; that is what I wish you. So be it.

CXL

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Reich-Hennersdorf, 20th June, 1759

It would be a singular trait in history, if they wrote in the 19th century that the famous Voltaire, who in his time had written so much against booksellers, fanatics and bad taste, had, by his works, so shamed the princes with the war they were carrying on, that he had obliged them to make peace and had dictated the conditions. That is a task for you to undertake,

you will raise yourself a monument thereby such as time will not obliterate. Virgil accompanied Maecenas on the journeys to Brundisium when Augustus made peace with Anthony; and Voltaire (they will say) without travelling was the preceptor of kings as well as of Europe. I hope you may add this feature to your life and that I may soon congratulate you on it.

CXLI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Reich-Hennersdorf, 2nd July, 1759

Do you think I take any pleasure in this dog's life, in seeing and causing the death of people unknown to me, in losing my friends and acquaintances daily, in seeing my reputation ceaselessly exposed to the caprices of fortune, in spending the whole year with uneasiness and apprehension, in continually risking my life and my fortune ?

I certainly know the value of tranquillity, the charms of society, the pleasures of life, and I like to be happy as much as anybody. Although I desire all these good things, I will not buy them with baseness and infamy. Philosophy teaches us to do our duty, to serve our country faithfully at the expense of our blood and of our repose, to commit our whole being to it. The illustrious Zadig endured many adventures not to his taste, and so did Candide; but they accepted

their fate patiently. What fairer example could one follow than that of these heroes ?

Believe me, our short jackets are as good as your red heels, Hungarian furs and the green doublets of Rhoxolanis. At the present moment we are in pursuit of these last who by their clumsiness play into our hands. You will see that I shall escape this year too and that I shall free myself from the greens and the whites.

The Holy Ghost must have ill-inspired the creature blessed by His Holiness[1] ; he seems to have plenty of lead in his back-side. I am the more certain to escape from all this because I have in my camp a real heroine, a virgin braver than Jeanne d'Arc. This divine wench was born in the middle of Westphalia, somewhere near Hildesheim. In addition I have a fanatic who comes I know not whence, who swears by God and all the devils that we shall hack them all in pieces.

This is how I reason. Good King Charles drove the English out of Gaul with the help of a maid, it is therefore clear that with the help of my maid we shall conquer the three whores ; for, as you know, the saints in Paradise still retain some interest in maids. I add to this that Mahomet had his pigeon ; Sertorius his hind ; your enthusiast of the Cevennes, his fat Nicole ; whereby I conclude that my maid and my fanatic will be at least as valuable to me.

The abominable enterprise of Damiens, the cruel attempt upon the King of Portugal, are among those

[1] Marshal Daun.

crimes which occur in peace as well as in war; they are the results of the fury and blindness of absurd zeal. In spite of the philosophic schools man will remain the most malevolent beast in the Universe; superstition, self-interest, vengeance, treason, ingratitude, will produce bloody and tragic scenes until the end of time, because we are governed by passions and very rarely by reason. There will always be wars, law-suits, devastations, plagues, earthquakes, bankruptcies. All the histories of the world run upon such matters.

Since that is so I think it must be necessary; Dr. Pangloss will tell you the reason. I, who have not the honour to be a doctor, confess my ignorance to you. But it seems to me that if this universe had been made by a benevolent being, he would have made us happier than we are. For calamities there is only the shield of Zeno, and for good fortune the crowns of the garden of Epicurus. Press your dairy-produce, ferment your wine, reap your fields, without troubling whether the year be abundant or sterile. The *Bien-Aimé's* gentleman promised me, like the old lion he is, to give a scratch to the *infamous*. I await your book. Meanwhile I send you an Akakia against His Holiness which I flatter myself will edify Your Beatitude.

I commend myself to the muse of the general of the Capucines, of the architect of the church at Ferney, of the prior of the Daughters of the Holy Sacrament, of the worldly glory of Pope Rezzonico, of the maid Jeanne, etc.

In truth I can keep it up no longer. I should speak as gladly of the Earl of the Sabines, the Knight of Tusculum, and the Marquis of Mantua. Titles are the decorations of fools; great men need nothing but their names.

Good-bye; health and prosperity to the author of *La Henriade*, to the most cunning and most seductive of wits who have been and ever will be in this world.

Vale.

CXLII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Ringswormeck, 15th July, 1759

Indeed you are a singular creature; when I want to scold you, you say two words and the reproach expires at the end of my pen.

I know that I idolised you, so long as I thought you were neither a mischief-maker nor malevolent; but you have played so many tricks upon me. . . . We will say no more about it; I have forgiven you everything with a Christian heart. After all, you have given me more pleasure than annoyance. I am the more amused by your works since I have felt your scratches. If you had no faults, you would humble the human race too much, and the universe would be right to be jealous and envious of your superiority.

Now we can say: "Voltaire is the finest genius of all ages; but at least I am more obliging, more tranquil, more sociable than he is." And that consoles the

vulgar for your elevation. At least, I speak to you as your confessor would do. Do not be angry, and try to add to all your superiorities the shades of perfection I wish with all my heart I could admire in you.

CXLIII

From Voltaire

August, 1759

Sire,

Once upon a time there was a lion and a rat; the rat fell in love with the lion; and went to pay his court to him; the lion tapped him with his paw; the rat went off to his hole, but still loved the lion; and seeing one day a net spread to catch and kill the lion, he gnawed through a mesh. Sire, the rat kisses most humbly your fair claws in all humility. He will never die between two Capucines as a dog from Saint-Malo did at Basle; he would rather have died near his lion. Be sure the rat had more affection than the dog.

CXLIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Wilsdruff, 19*th November*, 1759

I received the letter from the rat or the snake, on the 6th November at the end of the campaign. The

Austrians are retiring into Bohemia where I have burned two large magazines as reprisals for the fires they caused in my territories. I am making the retreat of the blessed hero as difficult as possible and I hope he will undergo some unpleasant adventures between now and a few days hence. You will learn from the declaration of the Hague whether the King of England and I are pacific. This striking measure will open the public's eyes and make a distinction between the firebrands of Europe and those who love humanity, tranquillity and peace. The door is open, anyone who likes can come into the parlour. France is now perfectly free to explain herself. It is for the French, who are naturally eloquent, to speak, for us to listen to them with admiration and to answer in a wretched gibberish as well as we can. It is a matter of the sincerity which each party will bring to the negociation. I am convinced we can find temperaments for an agreement. England has a wise and moderate minister at the head of its affairs. On all sides we must banish extravagant plans and consult reason rather than imagination. For my part, I conform to the example of the gentle Saviour who, when he went to the temple for the first time, contented himself with listening to the scribes and Pharisees. Do not think that the English confide all their secrets to me, they are in no hurry to make peace; their commerce does not suffer, their affairs prosper and the State lacks neither resources nor credit. The war I am fighting is harder than theirs because of the multitude of enemies who are attacking me, the burden of which is

crushing. However, I will always guarantee a successful end to the campaign; it is impossible to do as much for all events. I am about to make peace with the Russians; so next year I shall only have the Queen of Hungary, the marauders of the Holy Roman Empire and the brigands of Lapland. Our measure was dictated by our hearts, by a sentiment of humanity which is desirous of quenching the floods of blood which drench almost the whole of our sphere, desirous of putting an end to the massacres, the barbarities, the fires, and all the abominations committed by men who are daily rendered more ferocious by the dreadful habit of bathing in blood. If this war continues much longer, Europe will return to the shades of ignorance, and our contemporaries will become like savage beasts. All these disasters are a result of the ambitions of Austria and France. Let them set limits to their vast designs; if not from reason, at least let them learn wisdom from the exhaustion of their finances and the bad state of their affairs, and let them blush at learning that Heaven, which has supported the weak against the effort of the strong, has given the former sufficient moderation not to abuse their good fortune and to offer them peace. This is all a poor, tired, harassed, scratched, bitten, lame, cracked lion can tell you. I still have much to do and shall only be able to write to you at leisure after I have reached Dresden.

CXLV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Friedberg, 24th February, 1760

Virgil wrote verses as beautiful as yours, but he never made a peace. If you succeed, that will be an advantage you have gained over all your colleagues on Parnassus.

You tell me the details of an affair which never reached me. I know you were made to give up my verses and baubles at Frankfort; but I did not know and did not desire that your money and effects should be touched. That being so, you have a right to demand them; which I strongly approve of; and Schmidt need expect no protection from me in this matter.

I do not know the Bredow of whom you speak. He told you the truth. Steel and death have made terrible ravages among us; and the sad thing is that we are not yet at the end of the tragedy; you can easily imagine the result of such cruel shocks upon me; I wrap myself in stoicism as much as I can. Flesh and blood often revolt against the tyranny of Reason; but we must yield to it. If you saw me you would scarcely recognise me; I am old, broken, grey, wrinkled; I am losing my teeth and my gaiety. If this continues there will be nothing left of me but the mania of writing verses and an unbreakable attachment to my duties and the few virtuous men I know. My

path is difficult, filled with thorns and brambles. I have endured all the griefs which can afflict humanity and I often repeat those beautiful lines:

" Heureux qui retiré dans le temple des sages, etc."

A number of works attributed to you appear here; the *Salomon* which you have been malicious enough to have burned by the Parlement, a Comedy, *La Femme qui a Raison*, and the *Funeral Oration of Frère Berthier*. I have only replied to these works by those I send you, which certainly are not equal to them; but I fight my enemies in every way; the more they persecute me, the more work I shall give them. And if I die, it will be under a heap of their libels, among broken arms on a battle-field; and I guarantee that I shall go in good company to that land where your name is not known and where Boyer and Turenne are equal.

I should be very glad to receive you; I wish you all happiness; but where, when, and how? These are problems which neither d'Alembert nor the great Newton could solve.

CXLVI

From Voltaire

The Chateau de Tournay near Geneva, 21st April, 1760

Sire,

A poor monk of Saint-Just said to Charles V: " Sacred Majesty, are you not weary of troubling the world? Must you distress a poor monk in his cell? " I am the monk, but I have not yet renounced human

grandeurs and miseries like Charles V. What cruelty made you tell me that I calumniate Maupertuis, when the rumour after his death ran that the works of the philosopher of Sans Souci had been found in his strong-box? If they had been found there would that not have proved on the contrary that he had kept them faithfully, that he had communicated them to nobody, and that a bookseller had made use of them? And this would have disculpated persons who have perhaps been unjustly accused. Am I obliged to know that Maupertuis had sent them back to you? What interest have I in speaking ill of him? What do his person and his memory matter to me? How can I have wronged him by telling your Majesty that he had faithfully kept your trust until his death? I myself think of nothing but dying, and my hour draws near; do not trouble it with unjust reproaches and severities which are the more painful in that they come from you.

You have done me harm enough; you have embroiled me forever with the King of France, you have made me lose my offices and my pensions; at Frankfort you ill-treated me and an innocent woman, a respected woman, who was dragged through the mud and cast into prison, and afterwards, when honouring me with your letters, you mar the pleasantness of this consolation with bitter reproaches. Can it be possible that you should treat me thus, when I spent three years in trying, however uselessly, to serve you with no other object than that of following my manner of thought?

The greatest harm done by your works, is that the enemies of philosophy, scattered through all Europe, have through them been able to say: "Philosophers cannot live in peace and cannot live together. Here is a king who does not believe in Jesus Christ; he calls to his Court a man who does not believe in Christ either, and he ill-treats him; there is no humanity in these pretended philosophers and God punishes some of them by means of the others."

This is what is said and what is printed everywhere; and while the fanatics are united, the philosophers are scattered and miserable. While I am accused at the Court of Versailles and elsewhere of having encouraged you to write against the Christian religion, you reproach me, and add that triumph to the insults of the fanatics! This naturally fills me with horror for the world; happily I am cut off from it in my solitary domains. I shall bless the day when by dying I shall cease to suffer and above all to suffer through you; but I shall die wishing you a happiness which is perhaps impossible in your rank, and which philosophy alone can procure you in the storms of your life, if fortune allows you to limit it to cultivating long the fund of wisdom you have in you; an admirable fund, but spoiled by the passions inseparable from a great imagination, a little by ill-humour, and by the difficult situations which pour gall into your soul; and finally by the unfortunate pleasure you have always taken in trying to humiliate other men, by saying and writing sharp things to them; a pleasure unworthy of you,

the more so since you are the more elevated above them by your rank and your unique talents. No doubt you are sensible of these truths.

Forgive truths told you by an old man who has but a short time to live; he tells them to you with the more confidence because, himself convinced of his own inanities and his weaknesses so much greater than yours, but owing to his obscurity less dangerous, he cannot be suspected by you of thinking himself free from faults in order to assume the right of complaining of some of yours. He deplores the errors you may have committed as much as his own, and henceforth he will think only of how to repair before his death the disastrous errors of a deceitful imagination, by his sincere wishes that so great a man as you may be as happy and as great in everything as he ought to be.

CXLVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Meissen, 12th May, 1760

I know very well I have faults, great faults. I assure you I do not treat myself gently and that I forgive myself nothing when I speak to myself. But I confess this labour would be less fruitless if I were in a position where my soul was not forced to endure shocks so impetuous and agitations so violent as those to which it has been exposed for some time and to which it will probably still be liable.

Peace has flown away with the butterflies; there is no more talk of it. Everyone is making fresh efforts, and is anxious to fight *in saecula saeculorum.*

I shall not enter into an examination of the past. There can be no doubt you did me the greatest wrongs. No philosopher would have tolerated your conduct. I have forgiven you everything and am even willing to forget everything. But, if you had not had to deal with a fool in love with your great genius, you would not have escaped so easily from anyone else. Consider that said once for all, and let me hear no more of this troublesome niece, who has not her uncle's merit to hide her defects. People talk of Molière's servant, but nobody will talk of Voltaire's niece.

Good-bye, live peacefully in your retirement, and do not talk of dying. You are only sixty-two, your soul is still full of that fire which animates bodies and supports them. You will live to bury me and half the present generation. You will have the pleasure of writing a malicious couplet on my tomb and I shall not mind; I absolve you beforehand. It might be as well if you began to prepare the material now; perhaps you will be able to make use of it sooner than you think. For my part, I shall go there and tell Virgil there is a Frenchman who has surpassed him in his own art. I shall say as much to Sophocles and Euripides; I shall speak to Thucydides of your history, to Quintus Curtius of your *Charles XII;* and I shall perhaps be stoned by all these jealous dead because a single man has united all their different merits in

himself. But Maupertuis, to console them, will read *Akakia* to Zoilus in a corner.

CXLVIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Radeberg, 21st June, 1760

We were about to give battle yesterday; the enemy, who was here, has retired on Radeberg; so my plan has failed. You can tell all Switzerland this news if you like.

You still speak to me of peace; I have done all I could to arrange it between France and England, with myself included. The French tried to trick me, so I threw them over; it is all quite simple. I will not make peace without the English, and they will not make peace without me. I would rather be castrated than speak the syllable *peace* again to you Frenchmen.

What is the meaning of this pacific air your duke affects towards me? You say he cannot act as he would wish. What do I care what he wishes if he is not free to act accordingly? I abandon the *tripot* of Versailles to the wheedling of those who are amused by intrigue. I have no time to waste in these futilities; and, though I should perish, I would rather apply to the great Mogul than to Louis the *Bien-Aimé* to escape from my labyrinth.

I have said nothing against him. I bitterly regret having written in verse more good of him than he

deserves. And if during the present war, of which I consider him the promotor, I have not spared him in some of my pieces, the reason is that he exasperated me and that I am defending myself with all my weapons however blunt they may be. Moreover these odds and ends are not known to anybody. I do not understand these personalities therefore, unless you mean La Pompadour.

However, I do not think a king of Prussia owes any deference to a Miss Poisson, especially if she is arrogant and fails in the respect she owes to crowned heads.

This annoyance is really not worth the trouble of my speaking further. Do you want compliments? Well and good; I will tell you truths. In you I esteem the finest genius the ages have ever borne; I admire your verses, I like your prose, especially the little detached pieces in your *Mélanges de Littérature*. No author before you has ever possessed so fine a tact, so certain and delicate a taste. You are charming in conversation; you can instruct and amuse at the same time. You are the most seductive creature I know, able to make yourself beloved by everyone, when you wish. You have so many graces of the mind that you can offend and at the same time deserve the indulgence of those who know you. In short, you would be perfect if you were not a man.

Content yourself with this abridged panegyric. This is all the praise you will get out of me to-day. I have orders to give, positions to reconnoitre, dispositions to make and dispatches to dictate.

I recommend the *Comte* de Tournay to the protection of his guardian angel, of the most holy and immaculate virgin, and of the younger knight of the hanged.

Vale.

CXLIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

31st October, 1760

We have still two whole months of campaigning before us; this has been the hardest and most tiring of all; my temper is affected by it, my health is weakened, and my mind droops in proportion as its sheath threatens decay.

I do not know the Duc de Choiseul from Eve or from Adam. It matters little to me whether his sentiments are peaceful or warlike. If he loves peace, why does he not make it? I am so occupied with my own affairs, I have no time to think of those of others. But let us abandon these illustrious scoundrels, these scourges of earth and of humanity.

Tell me, what do you mean by writing a history of the wolves and bears of Siberia? What can you relate of the Tsar which cannot be found in the life of Charles XII? I shall not read the history of those barbarians; I wish I could ignore their existence in our hemisphere.

Your zeal is inflamed against the Jesuits and against

superſtitions. You do well to combat error; but do you think the world will change? The human mind is weak; more than three-quarters of humanity are made for slavery to the moſt absurd fanaticism. Fear of the devil and of hell faſcinates their eyes, and they deteſt the wise man who tries to enlighten them. The greater part of our species is silly and malevolent. In vain do I seek in them that image of God which the theologians assert they bear upon them. Every man has a wild beaſt in him; few can reſtrain it, moſt let loose the bridle when not reſtrained by the terror of the laws.

You will perhaps think me too misanthropical. I am ill; I am in pain; and I have to deal with half a dozen knaves and sluts who would confound a Socrates, a very Marcus Antoninus. You are fortunate in following Candide's advice, and in limiting yourself to the cultivation of your own garden. 'Tis not granted to everyone to do likewise. The ox muſt plough the furrow, the nightingale muſt sing, the dolphin muſt swim, and I muſt fight.

The longer I follow this occupation the more I am convinced that chance has moſt to do with it. I do not think I shall follow it much longer; my health is failing rapidly and I may soon depart to discuss *La Henriade* with Virgil and to descend to that land where our griefs, our pleasures and our hopes no longer pursue us; where your noble genius and that of a blackguard are reduced to the same value and where we return to the same ſtate as that which precedes birth.

Perhaps you will soon be amusing yourself by writing my epitaph. You will say that I loved good verses and wrote bad ones; that I was not so stupid as not to esteem your talents; in short, you will give the same account of me that Babouc gave of Paris to the djinni Ituriel.

Farewell; live happy, and say a little benedicite on behalf of the poor philosophers in Purgatory.

CL

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 8th January, 1766

No, there was never a more amusing old man than you are. You have kept all the gaiety and urbanity of your youth. Your letter on miracles made me laugh heartily. I did not expect to find myself there and was surprised to see myself placed between the Austrians and the pigs. Your mind is still young; and as long as it remains so there is nothing to fear for your body. The abundance of the liquor which circulates in the nerves and animates the brain proves that you still have the means of life.

If ten years ago you had said to me what you say at the end of your letter, you would still be here. No doubt men have their weaknesses, no doubt perfection is not granted them; I feel it myself, and I am

convinced of the injustice of exacting from others what we cannot accomplish ourselves and to which we could not attain. You ought to have begun there, and there would have been no more to say; and I should have loved you with your faults because you have enough great talents to cover a few weaknesses.

Great men are distinguished from the mob only by talents. We can prevent ourselves from committing crimes; but we cannot correct a temper which produces certain defects, as the most fertile earth produces tares at the same time as wheat. The *infamous* only produces venomous herbs; it is reserved to you to crush it with your formidable club, with the ridicule you throw on it, which deals more blows than all the arguments in the world. Few men can reason, all fear ridicule.

It is certain that those who are called honest men in all countries are beginning to think. In superstitious Bohemia, the ancient seat of fanaticism, persons of importance begin to open their eyes. The images of the saints are not so much worshipped as they used to be. Whatever barriers the court may oppose to the circulation of good books, the truth prevails in spite of all these severities. Although the progress is not rapid, 'tis a great point to see part of society tearing off the bandage of superstition.

In our Protestant countries we move more quickly; and perhaps in a century we shall entirely extinguish the animosities born from the parties *sub utroque et sub una*, and the Sorbonne. In all that vast domain of

fanaticism there remain only Poland, Portugal, Spain and Bavaria where superstition is maintained by crass ignorance and mental sluggishness.

As for your Genevans, since you have been there, they are not only unbelievers but have become wits. They carry on whole conversations in antithesis and epigrams. You have performed a miracle. What is the raising of the dead in comparison with giving imagination to those to whom nature had refused it? In France every tale of stupidity revolves about a Swiss; in Germany, although we are not supposed to be the most alert people in the world, we joke about the Swiss. You have changed everything. Where you live you create human beings; you are the Prometheus of Geneva. If you had remained here, we should now be something. The fatality which controls things in this life would not allow us to enjoy so many advantages.

Scarcely had you left our country when imaginative literature began to decline; and I fear geometry may there stifle the few germs which might reproduce the fine arts. Good taste was buried in Rome in the tombs of Virgil, Ovid and Horace; I fear that France by losing you will suffer the fate of the Romans.

Whatever happens, I have been your contemporary. You will last as long as I have to live, and I care little about the taste, sterility or abundance of posterity.

Good-bye; cultivate your garden, 'tis the wisest thing to do.

CLI

From Voltaire

1st February, 1766

Sire,

I am very late in sending you my thanks; but the reason is that I came very near to never sending them at all. This severe winter has almoſt killed me; I was very near going to find Bayle, to congratulate him upon having found an editor[1] who has even more reputation than he in more than one *genre;* he would certainly have jeſted with me because your Majeſty treated him as Jurieu did—you cut his article on David. I see the work has been printed from the second edition of Bayle. 'Tis a pity not to render David all the juſtice which is due him; he was an abominable Jew, he and his psalms. I know a more powerful and more generous king than he, one who in my opinion writes better verses. He does not make the mountains skip like rams, and the rams skip like mountains. He does not say that little ones should be dashed againſt the ſtones in the name of the Lord; he does not speak continually of serpents and basilisks. What especially pleases me in him is that in all his epiſtles there is not a single thought which is not true; his imagination never wanders. Exactness is the basis of his mind; and indeed without exactness there is neither mind nor talent.

I take the liberty of sending you a pebble of

[1] Frederick.

the Rhine in exchange for a cluster of diamonds. These are the only bargains I am able to make with you.

The devotees of Versailles were not too well pleased with the small confidence I have in Saint Geneviève; but the philosophical monarch will take my part.

Since the adventures of Neuchatel made you laugh, here are some more which I hope will amuse you. Since these serious matters occur in your dominions, it is right that they should be carried before the tribunal of Reason.

In France there is a new law-suit exactly similar to that of the Calas; and in a short time there will appear a memoir signed by several advocates, which may excite curiosity and sympathy. It will be seen that our Papists are still persuaded that the Protestants strangle their children in order to please God. If your Majesty wishes to have this memoir, I beg you will inform me of the means by which I can send it to you. I do not know if I should send it by post or by the German waggons.

CLII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 25th February, 1766

I should have been sorry to have you so soon in Bayle's company. Hasten slowly on that journey, and

remember you are the ornament of French literature in this age when humane letters begin to decline. But you will live for a long time; your old age is like the infancy of Hercules. That god crushed serpents in his cradle; and you, weighted with years, crush the *infamous*.

Your verses on the death of the Dauphin are beautiful. I think they attacked Saint Geneviève wrongly, because the queen and half the Court made ridiculous vows for the Dauphin's recovery. No doubt you are not ignorant of the holy conversation between the Bishop of Beauvais and God, who said to him: "We will see what we can do."

In an age when bishops speak to God, and when queens make pilgrimages, the bones of shepherdesses are more important than the statues of heroes; and philosophers and poets are abandoned. The progress of human reason is slower than people think. Here is the true reason: Almost every one is contented with vague ideas of things; few have the time to examine and to scrutinise them. Some, strangled by the chains of superstition from their childhood, will not or cannot break them; others, given up to frivolity, have not a word of geometry in their heads and enjoy life without ever interrupting their pleasures by a moment of reflection. To them add timid souls and fearful women and the total makes up society. If there is one man in a thousand who thinks, 'tis much. You and those like you write for him; the rest are scandalised and charitably damn you. For my part, who am not scandalised by you, I shall profit by the

advocates' memoir and all the good work you like to send me.

CLIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 7th August, 1766

My nephew wrote me that he meant to visit the philosopher of Ferney on his way. I envy him the pleasure of listening to you. My name was superfluous in your conversations; and you had so much to talk of, that the abundance of topics did not compel you to the necessity of mentioning the philosopher at Sans Souci to supply your discussions.

You speak of a colony of philosophers who mean to retire to Cleves; I make no opposition to it; I can grant them all they ask, except wood, which the visit of their compatriots has almost entirely destroyed in those forests, but on condition that they show deference to those who require it and that they observe decency in the works they print.

The scene which has occurred at Abbeville is tragic; but was there not some fault in those who were punished? Should we directly attack the prejudices which time has consecrated in the minds of nations? And if we wish to enjoy liberty of thought, must we insult established belief? A man who does not wish to make a disturbance is rarely persecuted. Remember Fontenelle's saying: "If my hand were

full of truths, I should think more than once before opening it."

The mob does not deserve to be enlightened; and if your Parlement has punished the unfortunate young man who struck the sign which Christians revere as the symbol of their salvation, you must accuse the laws of the kingdom.

If you asked me whether I should have imposed so harsh a sentence, I should say No and that, according to the light of nature, I should have fitted the punishment to the crime. You have broken a statue, I condemn you to replace it; you did not lift your hat to the parish priest who was carrying the thing you wot of, well! I condemn you to go to church for fifteen consecutive days without a hat; you have read Voltaire's works, ah! young man, we must form your judgment; and to that end you are commanded to study the *Summum* of Saint Thomas and the curate's asses' guide. The scatter-brain would perhaps have been more severely punished in this way than he has been by his judges; for boredom is an age and death a moment.

May Heaven or Destiny withhold death from your head and may you gently and peaceably enlighten the age you render illustrious! If you come to Cleves, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again and of assuring you of the admiration your noble genius has always inspired in me. Whereupon I pray God that He keep you in His holy and lofty guard.

CLIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 13th August, 1766

The devotees in France exclaim against the philosophers and accuse them of being the cause of all the misfortunes which happen. In the last war there were madmen who asserted that the Encyclopoedia caused the misfortunes of the French army. During this effervescence it happened that the ministry at Versailles needed money and so the philosophers who had no money and could give none were sacrificed to the clergy who promised it. For my part who am anxious neither for money nor benedictions, I offer a refuge to the philosophers, so long as they behave themselves and are as pacific as the noble title they assume implies; for all the united truths they announce are not worth the tranquillity of the soul, which is the only good thing men can enjoy on the atom they inhabit. For my part, who am a reasoner without enthusiasm, I should like men to be reasonable and above all tranquil.

We know the crimes which have been committed owing to religious fanaticism. Let us be careful not to introduce fanaticism into philosophy. Its character should be that of gentleness and moderation. It should pity the tragic end of a young man who has acted extravagantly; it should point out the excessive harshness of a law made in a gross and ignorant age;

but philosophy must not encourage similar actions and must not defy the judges who could not have given a sentence different from what they gave.

Socrates did not adore the *Deos majores et minores gentium;* yet he took part in public sacrifices. Gassendi went to Mass and Newton to sermons.

In society tolerance should guarantee to everyone the liberty to believe what he like. ; but this tolerance should not be extended so far as to authorise the effrontery and licence of young scatter-brains who audaciously insult what the people revere. These are my sentiments, which are in conformity with that which assures liberty and public safety, the first object of every legislation. I wager that as you read this you think: "That is very German, it is typical of the phlegm of a nation which has only embryonic passions."

Whereupon I pray God that He keep you in His holy and lofty guard.

CLV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Sans Souci, 13th September, 1766

I remember to have read in the burnt book you speak of that it was printed at Berne; the people of Berne have therefore exercised a legitimate jurisdiction over this work. They have burnt councils, controversies, fanatics, and popes; which I greatly applaud a a heretic. These are the merest stupidities

in comparison with what has happened at Abbeville. To roast men is beyond a joke; to throw paper in the fire is mere peevishness.

You ought to have an auto-da-fé at Ferney in reprisal, and condemn to the flames all the works of theology and controversy in your neighbourhood, collecting the theologians of every sect around the fire, in order to gratify them with this pleasing spectacle. For my part, who am one of little faith, I tolerate everybody on condition that they tolerate me, without troubling about people's faith.

Your missionaries will open the eyes of a few young people who will read or frequent them. But how many fools in a world who do not think! How many people given up to pleasure who are wearied by the act of reasoning! How many ambitious men absorbed in their plans! In all this vast number how few who care to learn and to become enlightened! The thick mist which blinded humanity in the 10th and 13th centuries is dispersed; yet most eyes are purblind; some have their eyelids stuck down.

Believe me, if the philosophers founded a government, within half a century the people would create new superstitions and would devote its worship to some object striking to the senses; or it would make itself little idols or it would revere the tombs of its founders, or it would invoke the sun, or some similar absurdity would overwhelm the pure and simple worship of the Supreme Being.

Superstition is a weakness of the human mind; it is inherent in that mind; it always has been, it always

will be. The objects of adoration may change like your French fashions; what does it matter whether people prostrate themselves before a piece of unleavened bread, before the ox Apis, before the Ark of the Covenant, or before a statue? The choice is not worth the trouble; the superstition is the same and reason gains nothing.

But to be in full health at seventy, to have one's mind free, to be still the ornament of Parnassus at that age, as in one's first youth, these are not matters of indifference. That is your destiny; I hope you may long enjoy it and may be as happy as human nature permits. Whereupon I pray God that He keep you in His holy and lofty guard.

CLVI

From Voltaire

5th January, 1767

Sire,

I felt sure your muse would awake sooner or later. I know that other men are amazed that after so long and so sharp a war, occupied with the care of re-establishing your kingdom, governing without ministers, entering into every detail, you are nevertheless able to write French verses; but I am not surprised, because I have the honour to know you very well; but what does surprise me, I must confess, is that your verses are good; I did not expect it after so many years of interruption. Strong and vigorous

thoughts, a keen survey of men's weaknesses, profound and true ideas, these were ever yours; but number and harmony, very often even delicacies of language, at three hundred leagues from Paris, in the Mark of Brandenburg—this phenomenon should certainly be noticed by our Academy in Paris.

Where is that time, Sire, when I had the happiness to dot your "i's" at Sans Souci and Potsdam? I assure you those two years were the most agreeable of my life. I have had the misfortune to build a country house on the frontiers of France and I greatly regret it. Patagonians, resinous pitch, the exultation of the soul and the hole to reach straight to the centre of the earth,[1] diverted me from my true centre. I have paid very dearly for that hole. I was made for you. I am ending my life in my small obscure sphere, precisely as you are passing yours in the midst of your grandeur and your glory. I know nothing but solitude and work; my society is composed of five or six people who leave me complete liberty, and with whom I act accordingly; for society without liberty is a torment. I am your Gilles in the matter of society and Belles Lettres.

I have recently had a very slight attack of apoplexy, caused by my own fault. We are almost always the creators of our own misfortunes. This accident has prevented my replying to your Majesty as soon as I should have wished.

You are perfectly right, Sire; a wise and courageous

[1] Refers to Maupertuis's book and the quarrel.

prince, with money, troops and laws, can perfectly well govern men without the aid of religion, which was only made to deceive them; but the stupid people would soon make one for themselves, and as long as there are fools and rascals there will be religions. Ours is assuredly the most ridiculous, the most absurd and the most bloody which has ever infected this world.

Your Majesty will do the human race an eternal service by extirpating this infamous superstition, I do not say among the rabble, who are not worthy of being enlightened and who are apt for every yoke; I say among honest people, among men who think, among those who wish to think. The number of these is very great; 'tis for you to feed their minds; 'tis for you to give white bread to the children of the house and to leave the black bread for the dogs. My one regret in dying is that I cannot aid you in this noble enterprise, the finest and most respectable which the human mind can point out.

CLVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 10th February, 1767

The accident which has happened to you saddens all those who hear of it. We flatter ourselves however that it will have no result; you have scarcely any body, you are only a mind, and that mind triumphs

over the illnesses and the infirmities of the nature it vivifies.

So the Jesuits may very likely be driven out of Spain. They have meddled with what did not concern them and the court claims to know that they excited the people to sedition.

Here in my neighbourhood the Empress of Russia has declared herself the protectress of the dissenters; the Polish bishops are furious. What a disastrous age for the Church of Rome! It is openly attacked in Poland, and its body-guards are driven out of France and Portugal. It appears that the same thing will happen in Spain.

The philosophers are openly undermining the foundations of the apostolic throne; the magician's conjuring book is joked about; the author of the sect is bespattered; tolerance is preached; all is lost. It will take a miracle to restore the Church. It has been struck by a terrible apoplexy; and you will yet have the consolation of burying it and writing its epitaph, as you once did for the Sorbonne.

The Englishman Woolstone calculated that the *infamous* would last two hundred years; he could not calculate what has happened quite recently, the question is to destroy the prejudice which serves as foundation to this edifice. It is crumbling of itself, and its fall will be but the more rapid.

Bayle began this; he was followed by a number of Englishmen, and you were reserved to complete it.

Long may you enjoy in peace all the different sorts of laurels with which you are covered; enjoy your

fame and the rare happiness of seeing that your productions are as brilliant at your sunset as at your dawn.

I hope this sunset will be greatly prolonged and I assure you I am one of those who take the most interest in it.

CLVIII

From Voltaire

3rd March, 1767

Your ally the Empress has been so kind as to send me her memoir of justification, which I thought well written. 'Tis an amusing thing, and apparently contradictory, to support indulgence and tolerance by force of arms; but then intolerance is so odious that it deserves to have its ears boxed. If superstition has made war for so long, why should we not make war on superstition? Hercules fought brigands and Bellerophon fought the Chimeras; I should not be sorry to see Hercules and Bellerophon deliver the world from the Catholic brigands and Chimeras.

However this may be, your two stories are very amusing; your genius is always the same, your superior genius is always ingenious and gay. I hope your Majesty will be graciously pleased to send me some new story on the folly of not allowing a prince to let his land when the meanest peasant is allowed to let his; this seems unjust to me, and certainly deserves a third story.

I had the honour to speak to you in my last letter of one Morival, a cadet in one of your regiments at Wesel; he is a young man of very good family who possesses excellent testimonials. Is it proper that he should have been condemned to be burned alive among the people of Picardy, because he did not salute a procession of Capucins and sang two songs? The Inquisition itself would not commit such horrors. If one casts an eye on the scene of this world, a man spends half his life in laughing and the other half in shuddering.

Grant me your favour, Sire, for the little time I still have to vegetate and to grovel on this wretched and ridiculous heap of mud.

CLIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 24th March, 1767

It is not reserved for arms to destroy the *infamous;* it will perish by the arms of truth and the seductions of interest. If you would like me to develop this idea, this is what I mean:

I have noticed, and others with me, that those places where there are most convents and monks are those where the people are the most blindly given up to superstition; it is not to be doubted that, if we could succeed in destroying these homes of fanaticism, the people would soon become indifferent and luke-

warm to those objects which it now venerates. It is therefore a matter of destroying the cloisters, at least of beginning to diminish their number. That moment has come, because the governments of France and Austria are in debt and have exhausted the resources of industry to discharge those debts, but without success. The bait of rich abbeys and of convents with large incomes is tempting. By pointing out to them the damage done to their population by celibates, as well as the abuse of the great number of Cucullati who fill their provinces and the facility of paying part of their debts from the treasures of these communities who have no heirs, I think they could be persuaded to begin this reform; and 'tis to be presumed that after they have profited by the secularisation of a few benefices, their greed will absorb the rest.

Every government which makes up its mind to this operation will be a friend to the philosophers and a defender of all books which attack popular superstition and the false zeal of hypocrites who would oppose it.

I submit this little plan to the examination of the patriarch of Ferney. 'Tis for him, as the father of the faithful, to rectify it and to carry it out.

The patriarch will perhaps ask me what is to be done with the bishops; I answer that it is not yet time to touch them; that we must begin by destroying those who fan the fire of fanaticism in the hearts of the people. As soon as the people have cooled, the bishops will become little boys whom the sovereigns can treat as they like from the mere lapse of time.

The power of ecclesiastics is only a matter of opinion; 'tis founded on the credulity of peoples. Enlighten them and the enchantment will cease.

After much difficulty I have discovered La Barre's unfortunate companion[1]; he is an ensign at Wesel, and I have written for him.

CLX

From Voltaire

6th April, 1767

I shall never be consoled for the misfortune which causes me to end my life far from you. I am as happy as a man can be in my situation, but I am far distant from the only truly philosophical prince. I know very well that many sovereigns think as you do. But where is the king who could write the preface to the History of the Church? Where is he whose mind is powerful enough and whose eye has the sagacity to dare to see and to say that government can be carried on without the mean succour of a sect? Where is the prince sufficiently educated to know that for seventeen hundred years the Christian sect has done nothing but harm?

Were I not so old and did I possess health, I should leave without regret the house I have built and the trees I have planted, to end my life at Cleves with two or three philosophers and to devote my last

[1] Étallonde de Morival.

days under your protection to the printing of a few useful books. But, Sire, cannot you, without compromising yourself, encourage a bookseller in Berlin to reprint them and to distribute them throughout Europe at a price which would make the sale easy? It would be an amusement for your Majesty and those who laboured at this good work would be rewarded in this world more than in the other.

As I was about to continue asking this favour, I received the letter of the twenty-fourth of March with which your Majesty honours me. You are right to say the *infamous* will never be destroyed by force of arms, for it would be necessary to fight for another superstition which would only be accepted if it were more abominable. Arms can dethrone a Pope, dispossess an ecclesiastical Elector but not dethrone a delusion.

I cannot conceive why you did not take some good bishopric for the cost of the war in the last treaty; but I realize that you will only destroy the Christ-worshipping superstition by the arms of reason.

Your idea of attacking through the monks is that of a great general. Once the monks are abolished, the error is exposed to universal scorn. Much is being written in France on this topic; everybody is talking about it. The Benedictines themselves are so ashamed of wearing a gown covered with opprobrium that they have petitioned the king of France to be secularised; but it was thought the time was not ripe for this great undertaking; they are not

sufficiently bold in France and the devotees still have credit.

I have with me a young man named Monsieur de La Harpe, who cultivates good letters with success. He has written an Epistle from a monk to the founder of La Trappe, which seems excellent to me. I shall have the honour to send it to your Majesty by the first ordinary. I do not think he will be condemned to be racked and burned like the unfortunate young man at Wesel, whom I know to be an excellent subject. In the name of reason and benevolence, I thank your Majesty for the protection you extend to this victim of the fanaticism of our Druids.

CLXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 5th May, 1767

The town of Jerusalem, built by God's people, is possessed by the Turks; the Capitol, that refuge of nations, that august spot where a Senate, master of the universe, assembled, is now inhabited by reformed Franciscans; and Ferney, the soft and agreeable refuge of philosophy, serves as headquarters to French troops. But you will soften these ferocious warriors, as your predecessor, Orpheus, tamed tigers and lions.

It is sad that you, like the rest of human beings, should be subject to the infirmities of age; the bodies joined to privileged souls like yours should be exempted

from them. The arts and sciences of our little country will regret your loss for ever. Such a loss cannot be easily repaired; and your memory will not perish among us.

You can make use of our printers as you desire. They enjoy complete liberty; and since they are in communication with those of Holland, France and Germany I have no doubt they possess the means of distributing books wherever they think fit.

We have gained a new victory in Spain; the Jesuits are expelled from that Kingdom. Moreover, the courts of Versailles, Vienna and Madrid have requested the Pope to suppress a considerable number of monasteries. They say the holy father will be obliged to consent, though much against his will. Cruel revolution! What may not be expected of the century which will follow ours? The axe is laid to the root of the tree; on the one hand the philosophers rise up against the absurdities of a revered superstition; on the other, the abuses of dissipation force the princes to seize the property of the recluses, the tools and trumpets of fanaticism. The edifice, undermined at its foundations, is about to collapse; and the nations will write in their annals that Voltaire was the promoter of that revolution in the human mind which took place in the nineteenth century.

Who would have said in the twelfth century that the light which lightened the world would come from a little Swiss village called Ferney?

CLXII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 31st July, 1767

I am growing prodigiously old, my dear Voltaire; everything has greatly changed since the times you remember. My stomach hardly digests at all and I have been forced to give up supper parties. In the evening I read or engage in conversation. My hair is going white, I am losing my teeth, my legs are ruined with gout; I still vegetate, and I perceive that time marks a considerable difference between forty and fifty-six. Add to this that since the peace I have been overwhelmed with work, so that nothing is left in my head save a little common sense, with a reviving passion for the sciences and fine arts. They are my consolation and my joy.

Your mind is younger than mine; doubtless you have drunk of the fountain of eternal youth, or you have found some secret unknown to the great men who preceded you.

You are about to work on the *Age of Louis XV*, but is it not dangerous to write of facts which touch our own times? 'Tis the ark of the Lord, which none must touch. This reminds me that I must ask you a question. We speak of the age of Augustus, the age of Louis XIV; how far should this age be extended? How far before the birth of him who gives it his name and how far after his death? Your reply will decide

a small literary discussion which has arisen here on this subject.

I envy Lentulus the pleasure of seeing you. Since you speak of him, I suppose he has been to Ferney. He will have seen you face to face, as the great Condé on his death-bed hoped to see God. For my part, I see nothing but my garden. We have celebrated a marriage, and then a betrothal. I am establishing my family. I have more nephews and nieces than you have. We all lead a peaceful and philosophical life.

CLXIII

From Voltaire

November, 1769

Sire,

A Bohemian named Grimm, who has a great deal of wit and philosophy, tells me you have initiated the Emperor into our holy mysteries, and that you are not too well pleased that two years have passed without my writing to you.

I thank your Majesty most humbly for this little reproach; I will confess that I was so much distressed and ashamed at the lack of success of my transmigration to Cleves, that since then I have not dared to present your Majesty with any of my ideas. When I think that a madman and an imbecile like Ignatius found a dozen proselytes to follow him, and that I could not find three philosophers, I am tempted to think that Reason is useless; moreover, whatever you may say,

I am very old and, in spite of all my coquettings with the Empress of Russia, the fact is that I have been long moribund and am dying.

But I rise again and regain all my feelings towards your Majesty and all my philosophy, to write to you to-day about a small English extravagance which touches your person. You will guess that this English stupidity is not gay; there are many wise men in England, but there are as many gloomy fanatics. One of these enthusiasts, perhaps with good intentions, took it upon himself to print in the gazette of the Court, which is called *The Whitehall Evening Post*, on the 7th October, a pretended letter from me to your Majesty in which I exhort you no longer to corrupt the nation you govern. Here are the very words faithfully translated: "What a pity, if the extent of your learning, your talents and your virtues only serves to pervert these gifts of heaven and to cause misery and desolation to the human race! You have nothing to desire in this world, Sire, except the august title of a Christian hero."

I flatter myself that this fanatic will soon print a letter from me to Mustapha the great Turk, in which I shall exhort his Highness to be a Mahommedan hero; but since Mustapha has none of the makings of a hero and my true heroine, the Empress of Russia, will look to it, I do not think I shall undertake this Turkish conversion. I am only attached to the Princes and Princesses of the North, who seem to me more enlightened than the whole harem of Constantinople.

I replied to the author who imputes to me this fine letter to your Majesty in the following lines: "In the Whitehall Evening Post of the 7th October, 1769, number 3668, I see a pretended letter from me to H.M. the King of Prussia; this letter is very silly; I did not, however, write it. Given at Ferney, this 29th October, 1769, Voltaire."

CLXIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 25th November, 1769

You are too modest if you think that a silence like that you have kept for two years can be endured with patience. No, indeed. Every man who loves literature must take an interest in your conversation, and be very glad when you yourself give news of it.

I am very glad that English stupidity has resuscitated you; I should like madmen who performed such miracles. This does not prevent me from considering the English author to be an ancient Pict who knows nothing of Europe. A man must indeed be green to transform you into a father of the Church, labouring for my conversion out of pity to my soul. 'Tis to be wished that your French bishops had a similar opinion of your orthodoxy; you would live the more peacefully.

As to the grand Turk, he is thought most orthodox at Rome as at Versailles. These gentlemen assert

that he is fighting for the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman faith. 'Tis the crescent defending the cross, supporting the bishops and confederates of Poland against the accursed heretics, both the Greeks and the dissenters, and fighting for the greater glory of the most holy father. If I had not read the history of the crusades in your books I might perhaps have abandoned myself to the folly of conquering Palestine, of delivering Sion and of gathering the palms of Idumaea; but the follies of so many kings and paladins who fought in those distant lands have prevented me from imitating them, with the certainty that the Empress of Russia would give a good account of them. I limit my exertions to exhorting the confederates to union and peace, to pointing out to them the difference there is between persecuting their religion and exacting from them that they do not persecute others; in short I wish Europe were at peace and everyone contented. I think I have inherited these sentiments from the late Abbé de Saint Pierre and, like him, it may well be that I shall remain the only one in my sect.

CLXV

From Voltaire

Ferney, 9th December, 1769

Pausanias, in his *Prussiaques*,[1] says that Alexander carried his love for the fine arts so far as to write poems

[1] Refers to Racine's *Plaideurs*.

in the language of the Welches,[1] and that his verses always contained uncommon salt, harmony, just ideas, a wide knowledge of men, and that he wrote his poems with incredible facility; moreover, that those for Thalestris were full of grace and harmony.

He adds that these talents greatly surprised the Macedonians and the Thracians, who had little knowledge of Greek poetry, and that they learned from other nations how much wit their master possessed; for they only knew him as a brave warrior who governed as well as he fought.

In those days, says Plutarch, there was an old Welche dwelling in solitude among the mountains of Caucasus, who had formerly been at Alexander's Court and who lived as happily as a man could far from the camp of the conqueror of Arbela and Basroc. This old dotard often said he was sorry to die without having paid his court once more to the hero of Macedon.

Sire, I have no doubt that you have at your court scholars who have read Pausanias, Plutarch, and Xenophon in the library of your new palace; they can show you the Greek passages I have the honour to quote to you and your Majesty will see that nothing could be truer.

[1] A word used by Voltaire contemptuously of the French.

CLXVI

From Voltaire

Ferney, 27th April, 1770

Sire,

When you were ill I was ill too, and I even wrote prose and verse like you, with this difference, that my verse and prose were not worth much; I conclude that I was made to live and die near you, and that if this has not happened it is due to a misunderstanding.

While you are a Jesuit I have become a Capucin; 'tis one more reason which should keep me in Berlin; however, I hear that Brother Ganganelli has condemned my works or at least those sold by the booksellers under my name.

I shall write to his Holiness that I am a very good Catholic and I shall name your Majesty as my guarantor.

I do not in the least renounce my halo; and since I am almost dead with inflammation of the lungs I beg you will have me canonized as soon as possible; it will only cost you £100,000. 'Tis exceedingly cheap.

When you must be canonized, Sire, we must apply to Marcus Aurelius. Your dialogues follow his taste and his principles; I do not know anything more useful. You have discovered the secret of being the defender, the legislator, the historian and the instructor of your kingdom; that is true and I defy anyone to say as much of Mustapha. You should make arrange-

ments to seize some of the spoils of that fat pig; it would be doing a service to the human race.

Never have I seen so much show and stupidity. Soon I shall see nothing at all, for I am dying.

Be graciously pleased to receive the blessing of Saint Francis and send me that of Saint Ignatius.

CLXVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Charlottenbourg, 24th May, 1770

I think you very much a Capucin, since you wish it, and even that you are sure of being canonized among the fathers of the Church. I do not know any of them comparable with you and I begin by saying: Saint Voltaire, pray for us!

However, the holy father has burned you at Rome. Do not suppose that you alone enjoy that favour; my abridgment of Fleury has had a similar fate. There seems to be a striking affinity between us. I am the protector of the Jesuits, you of the Capucins; your works are burned at Rome, and so are mine. But you are a saint, and I yield you the preference.

What, Mr. Saint, you are surprised there should be a war in Europe without me! This is none too canonical. Learn then, that the philosophers have rendered me pacific by their continual declamations against what they call "mercenary brigands." The Empress of Russia may make war as much as she

pleases; she has paid Diderot in hard cash[1] for a dispensation to allow the Russians to fight the Turks. But I keep quiet, for I dread philosophical censure, encyclopædic excommunication, and the crime of lése philosophy. Since no book has yet appeared against subsidies, I thought I might be allowed by natural and civil law to pay them to my ally to whom I owe them; and I am quite in order with those instructors of the human race who take upon them the right of chastising princes, kings, and emperors, who disobey their rules.

For the rest I sincerely hope for the strengthening of your chest. I still think you will not make a false step so soon. Be content with the miracles you perform in this life, and do not be in a hurry to perform them after your death. You are sure of the former and the philosophers might suspect the others. Whereupon I pray Saint John of the desert, Saint Anthony, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Cucufin to keep you in their holy and lofty guard.

CLXVIII

From Voltaire

8th June, 1770

Your Majesty is well repaid for your devotion to Saint Ignatius; never mind a wretch like me, who am

[1] She had bought Diderot's library and allowed him the use of the books during his lifetime.

only in the service of Saint Francis. This misfortune, Sire, is that nothing is to be gained by punishing Brother Ganganelli; would to God he had some pleasant domain in your neighbourhood and that you were not so far from Our Lady of Loretto.

Why do you not occupy yourself with the vicar of Simon Barjona, while the Empress of Russia is dusting the vicar of Mahommed? You would both have purged the earth of two odd stupidities. I once had great hopes of you; but you have contented yourself with making fun of Rome and me, of going directly for the solid things of life and with being a very shrewd hero.

I beg, Sire, that you will try to have pity on my old prejudices in favour of the Greeks against the Turks; I prefer the family of Socrates to the descendants of Orcan, in spite of my profound respect for princes.

Sire, you know that if you had not been a king, I should have lived and died near you.

CLXIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Sans Souci, 7th July, 1770

The good friar of the Vatican is after all not so peevish as people imagine. If he burns a few books, 'tis only to keep up the custom; besides, the Roman noses like to sniff the odour of the smoke.

But do you not admire the patience worthy of the spotless lamb with which he allows himself to be deprived of the county of Avignon? How little he thinks of it and in what concord he lives with the most Christian king! For my part I should be wrong to complain of him; he leaves me my dear Jesuits, who are persecuted everywhere. I shall preserve the precious seed so that one day I can supply those who may wish to cultivate this rare plant.

Even if Loretto were next door to my vineyard, I should certainly not touch it. Its treasures might seduce a Mandrin, a Conflans, a Turpin, a Richelieu, and their like. It is not that I respect the gifts consecrated by the besotted, but we must spare what is venerated by the public; we must not give cause for scandal; and, though we may think ourselves wiser than others we should not shock their prejudices, out of pity for their weakness. 'Tis to be wished that the pretended philosophers of our day thought thus.

In this age when Ferney rises on the ruins of Delphi, 'tis fitting that offerings should be sent to you; the genius who dwells there lacks nothing but immortality. All men of letters should join in wishing it; they should look upon you as a column whose strength supports a crumbling edifice, the foundations of which are already being undermined by barbarians. A swarm of geometers is already persecuting Belles Lettres by prescribing laws to degrade them. What will happen when they no longer have their sole

support and when frigid imitators of your noble genius vainly attempt to take your place? God preserve me from having for my amusement nothing but short and arid solutions of problems even more boring than useless! But let us not look forward to so unpleasant a future, and let us content ourselves with enjoying what we possess.

CLXX

From Voltaire

27th July, 1770

Sire,

You and the King of China are the only two sovereigns of our day who are both philosophers and poets. I had just read an extract from two poems by the Emperor Kien-long, when I received the prose and verse of Frederick the Great. I come first to your prose whose subject interests all men as well as you masters of the world. You are like Marcus Aurelius, who combated the system of Lucretius by moral reflections.

I had already seen a little refutation of the *Système de la Nature* by a man among my friends. He had the good fortune to agree more than once with your Majesty; it is a good sign when a king and a private man think alike; their interests are often so different that when they are united in their ideas they must be right.

It seems to me that your remarks ought to be

printed; they are lessons for the human race. With one arm you support the cause of God, and with the other you crush superſtition. It would be worthy of a hero publicly to adore God and to buffet the man who calls himself God's vicar. If you are unwilling to print your remarks in your capital, as Kien-long has juſt printed his poems in Pekin, be graciously pleased to give me the task and I will publish them immediately.

Atheism can never do any good and superſtition has done infinite harm; let us save ourselves from these two gulfs. If anyone can do the world this service, it is you.

Not only do you refute the author, but you show him how he should proceed in order to be useful.

Moreover, you box the ears of Brother Ganganelli and his crew; so, in this work, you do juſtice to everyone. Brother Ganganelli and his harlequins ought to know with the reſt of Europe who wrote the fine preface to the abridgment of Fleury. Their absurd insolence is unpardonable. Your cannons might capture Rome, but they would do too much harm to right and left; they would harm you, and we are no longer in the times of the Herules and the Lombards but of Kien-long and Frederick. Ganganelli will be sufficiently punished by a shaft from your pen; your Majeſty reserves your sword for better occasions.

Permit me to make a little remark on the underſtanding between kings and prieſts with which the

author of the *Système* reproaches crowned and tonsured heads. You are perfectly right to say that this is not so and that our philosophical atheist does not know how the world wags nowadays. But, my lords, this is what happened of old; this was how you began; and in this way the Alboins, the Theodorics and Clovis and their first successors manœuvred with the Popes. "Let us share the spoil, take the tithes and leave me the rest; bless my conquest, I will protect your usurpation; let us fill our purses; say on behalf of God that I must be obeyed and I will kiss your feet." This treaty was signed in the blood of nations by conquerors and priests. These are called "the two powers."

Finally the two powers quarrelled and you know what it cost your Germany and Italy. In our days everything has changed. The devil knows there are not two powers in your Majesty's dominions and in the vast Empire of Catherine II! So you are right in the present, and the philosophical atheist is right in the past.

In any case your work must be published. Hide not your light under a bushel, as the other says.

I confess I do not understand why the emperor does not take this opportunity to seize Bosnia and Serbia; it would scarcely cost the journey. We are losing the opportunity of driving the Turk out of Europe; perhaps it will not return; but I shall be consoled if in the hubbub your Majesty rounds off your Prussia.

CLXXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 18th August, 1770

Hide not your light under a bushel. This passage was certainly addressed to you; your genius is a torch which should enlighten the world. My lot has been that of a feeble candle, which scarcely suffices to light me, and its dim glow disappears in your rays.

I do not know why the emperor does not take part in this war. I am not his ally. But his secrets must be known to M. de Choiseul, who could explain them to you.

The monk at St. Peter's has burnt my writings and did not excommunicate me at Easter, as his predecessors have been accustomed to do. This proceeding reconciles me with him; for I have a kind heart and you know how much I like to communicate. But if I had two chapels like yours at Ferney, I think I might receive this mysterious breakfast.

I am leaving for Silesia and shall meet the emperor, who has invited me to his camp in Moravia, not to fight as of old, but to live as good neighbours. He is an amiable and deserving prince. He likes your books and reads them as much as he can; he is anything but superstitious. In short, he is an emperor such as Germany has not had for a long time. Neither of us likes the ignorant and the barbarous; but this is not

a reason for extirpating them; if they had to be destroyed, the Turks would not be the only ones. How many nations are plunged in stupidity and have become rustic through lack of enlightenment!

But let us live and allow others to live. May you especially live long and never forget that there are people in the north of Germany who never fail to do justice to your noble genius.

CLXXII

From Voltaire

Ferney, 20th August, 1770

Sire,

The philosopher d'Alembert informs me that the great philosopher of the sect and species of Marcus Aurelius, the cultivator and protector of the arts, has encouraged anatomy by deigning to place himself at the head of those who have subscribed for a skeleton[1]; the skeleton possesses a very sensitive old spirit, which is deeply touched by the honour your Majesty does it. I long thought that the idea of this caricature was a jest; but since the chisel of the great Pigalle is really being employed, and since the name of the greatest man in Europe adorns this enterprise of my fellow-citizens, I do not know anything so serious. I humiliate myself by feeling how unworthy I am of the honour done me and at the same time I abandon myself to feelings of the keenest gratitude.

[1] Pigalle's statue of Voltaire, raised by public subscription.

The French Academy has inscribed in its registers the letter with which you honoured M. d'Alembert on this subject. All this I learned at the same time: I am astonished, I am at your feet, I thank you, I do not know what to say.

Providence, to diminish my pride, which would have grown inflated with so many favours, has willed that the Turks should recapture Greece; at least it has allowed the gazettes to say so. 'Tis a most cruel blow to me. Not that I have an inch of land in Athens or Corinth. Alas! all I have is near Switzerland; but you know how pleased I was to see the descendants of Sophocles and Demosthenes delivered from an ignorant Pasha. Your excellent refutation of the *Système de la Nature* would have been translated into Greek, and it would have been printed with an excellent engraving in the place where the Lyceum used to be.

I have dared to make a reply on my side; thus God has the two least superstitious men in Europe on His side, which ought to please Him greatly. But I thought my reply so inferior to yours that I dared not send it to you. Moreover, in laughing at the eels of the Jesuit Needham, which Buffon, Maupertuis and the translator of Lucretius have adopted, I could not prevent myself from laughing also at all these wonderful systems; at that of Buffon, who pretends that the Alps were made by the sea; at him who gave men porpoises as their origin; and finally at him who exalted his soul[1] in order to predict the future.

[1] Maupertuis.

I can never forget the irreparable wrong he did me; I shall never think of the calumny of "the linen given to the washerwoman to launder", of that insipid calumny which was a mortal blow to me, and of all that resulted, save with a grief which will poison my last days. But all that d'Alembert tells me of your Majesty's favours is so powerful a balm to my wounds that I reproach myself for the grief which still pursues me.

CLXXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 16th September, 1770

I was not sorry that the sentiments I expressed on the subject of your statue in a letter written to M. d'Alembert should have been divulged. They are truths of which I have always been completely convinced, and neither Maupertuis nor anyone else has effaced them from my mind. It was perfectly just that you should enjoy the gratitude of the public in your lifetime, and that I should have some part in this demonstration of your contemporaries, since I have had so much in the pleasure given them by your works.

The trifles I write are not in this class; they are an amusement to me; I instruct myself by thinking about these philosophical matters and I sometimes scribble my thoughts about them too rashly. The work on the *Système de la Nature* is too bold, too daring

for the readers into whose hands it might fall. I do not wish to scandalise anybody; when I wrote it I spoke to myself alone. But as soon as it is a question of making a public pronouncement, my invariable maxim is to respect the delicacy of superstitious ears, to shock no one, and to wait until the age is sufficiently enlightened for one to be able to think aloud with impunity.

I hear no more talk of the modern Greeks. If ever the sciences should flourish with them again, they will be jealous that a Gaul has surpassed their Homer by his *Henriade*, that this same Gaul has triumphed over Sophocles, has equalled Thucydides and has left far behind him Plato, Aristotle, and the whole school of the Portico.

For my part, I think that the barbarians who possess those fair countries will be obliged to implore the clemency of their conquerors and that they will find in Catherine's soul as much moderation in making peace as energy in conducting war. And as to that fatality which, according to the author of the *Système de la Nature*, presides over events, I do not know when it will bring about the revolutions which will revive the sciences, buried for so long in these enslaved countries, degraded from their ancient splendour.

My principal occupation is to combat ignorance and prejudices in the country which, owing to the chance of birth, I now govern; to enlighten minds, to cultivate morals, and to make men as happy as human nature allows and the methods I can employ will permit.

CLXXIV

From Voltaire

Ferney, 12th October, 1770

Sire,

We have been happy for a fortnight; d'Alembert and I have talked continually of your Majesty, which is what all thinking beings do; and if there are any in Rome they do not discuss Ganganelli. I do not know if d'Alembert's health will permit him to go to Italy; he may content himself this winter with the sun of Provence and display his eloquence concerning the hero-philosopher only to the descendants of our ancient troubadours. For my part, my weak voice is only heard by the Swiss and the echoes of Lake Geneva.

I have just heard that the Prince of Brunswick, sent by you to the victorious army of the Russians, has died of disease. 'Tis one hero the less in the world, and I must make your Majesty a double compliment of condolence; he had only caught a glimpse of life and glory, but after all do those who live a hundred years do more? I only caught a glimpse of Frederick the Great; I admire him, I am attached to him, I thank him, I am profoundly touched by his favours for the moment which remains to me—that is all of which I am certain for these two moments.

But for eternity, the matter is a little more doubtful; we are surrounded by the empire of doubt, and doubt is a disagreeable state. Is there a God as they say, a

soul as they imagine, relations such as they establish? Is there anything to hope for after the moment of life? When Gilimer was deprived of his dominions, was he right to laugh when brought before Justinian? Was Cato right to kill himself for fear of seeing Cæsar? Is glory only an illusion, is Mustapha in the relaxation of his harem, committing all possible stupidities, ignorant, conceited, and conquered, happier when he digests well than a hero-philosopher who does not digest?

Are all beings equal before the great Being who animates nature? In this case, Ravaillac's soul would be forever equal to that of Henri IV; or neither of them would have had a soul. Let the hero-philosopher disentangle all this, for I can make nothing of it.

CLXXV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 30th October, 1770

You sympathize in the loss I have just undergone of my nephew Brunswick; his life did not last long enough to allow him to perceive what he might know or what he would have to ignore. If it were possible that there is anything after this life, he would certainly know more of it now than both of us together. But there is every reason to suppose that he knows nothing at all. A philosopher of my acquaintance,[1] a man

[1] Frederick himself.

tolerably well settled in his views, thinks we have sufficient degrees of probability to reach the certainty that *post mortem nihil est*.

He asserts that man is not a double being, that we are only matter animated by movement, and that, as soon as the worn-out parts refuse to work, the machine is destroyed and its components dissolved. This philosopher says that it is far more difficult to speak of God than of man, because we only come to suspect His existence by means of conjectures and because the least inept idea about Him which our reason can supply us with, is to believe Him the intelligent principle of all that animates nature. My philosopher is fully persuaded that this intelligence is no more concerned with Mustapha than with the most Christian king; and that what happens to men occupies him as little as what happens to an ant-hill which a traveller crushes under foot without noticing it.

My philosopher looks upon the animal kingdom as an accident of nature, like the dust thrown up by wheels, although the wheels are only made to move a cart rapidly. This strange man says there is no relation between animals and the Supreme Intelligence, because weak creatures can neither harm nor do Him service; that our vices and our virtues are relative to society and that the penalties and rewards we receive from society suffice us.

If there were a holy tribunal of the Inquisition, I should have been tempted to roast my philosopher for the edification of his neighbours; but we

Protestants have deprived ourselves of that soft consolation; and then the fire might have burned my own clothes.

CLXXVI

From Voltaire

Ferney, 11th January, 1771

Great prophet, you resemble your predecessors sent by the most high; you perform miracles, I owe my life to you. I was dying in the midst of my Swiss snows, when your sacred vision was brought to me. As I read, my head freed itself, my blood circulated, my soul revived; after the second page I regained my strength, and owing to the singular effect of this celestial medicine, it gave me back my appetite and disgusted me with all other food.

The eternal of old ordered your predecessor Ezechial to eat a parchment book; I should gladly have eaten your paper, had I not preferred a hundred times to re-read it. Yes, you are the only prophet of Jehovah, since you are the only one who has told the truth and laughed at all his comrades; therefore Jehovah has blessed you by strengthening your throne, sharpening your pen and illuminating your soul.

Thus spoke the Lord: "This is he whom I announced: He shall make flat the high places and raise them that are low; behold he comes; he shall teach the children of men that a man may be brave and merciful, great and simple, eloquent and a poet;

for I have taught him all these things. I illuminated him when he came into the world, so that he should make me known as I am and not as the foolish children of men have painted me. For I take all the spheres of the universe as witness that I, their founder, was never scourged nor hanged in that little globe of the earth; that I never inspired any Jew or crowned any Pope; but in the fullness of time I sent my servant Frederick, who is not called mine anointed, because he was not anointed; but he is my son and my image and I said unto him: 'My son, it is not enough to have made thy enemies thy footstool and to have given laws to thy kingdom, but thou shalt drive superstition forever from this globe.'"

And the great Frederick said unto Jehovah: "The monster of superstition have I driven from my heart and from the hearts of all that are near me; but, Father, you have arranged this world in such a way that I can only do good in my own house and even then with some difficulty. How do you expect me to give common sense to the people of Rome, Naples and Madrid?"

Then said Jehovah: "Thy lessons and thy examples shall suffice; give them long enough, O my son, and I will cause these germs to grow and to produce fruit in their time."

And the great prophet answered and said: "O Jehovah! You are very powerful, but I defy you to make all men reasonable. Take my advice, and content yourself with a small number of the elect; you will never have more for your share."

CLXXVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 29th January, 1771

On reading your letter I should have thought Ovid's correspondence with King Cotys still continues, had I not seen the name of Voltaire at the end of the letter. It differs from that of the poet Latin only in that Ovid was so complacent as to write verses in the language of Thrace while your verses are in your natural tongue.

At the same time I received the *Questions Encyclopédiques*, which might be more justly entitled *Instructions Encyclopédiques*. This work is full of things. What variety, what knowledge, what profundity! And what art to treat so many subjects with the same charm! If I wrote in the precious style, I should say that in your hands everything turns to gold.

But what an edifying circumspection in the articles touching the faith! Your protégées, the Pediculosi, must have been delighted; the Sorbonne will attach you to its body; the most Christian king (if he reads) will bless Heaven that he has so orthodox a gentleman of the Chamber; and the Bishop of Orleans will assign you a place near Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Your relics will certainly perform miracles and the infamous will celebrate his triumph.

Where is the philosophic mind of the 18th century,

if the philosophers, from deference to their readers, scarcely dare to allow them a glimpse of the truth? It must be admitted that the author of the *Système de la Nature* has spoken out too impudently. The book has done much harm; it has made philosophy odious by certain conclusions he draws from its principles. And perhaps softness and deference are now needed to reconcile with philosophy the minds alarmed and revolted by this author.

I concern myself with my own affairs and with Carnival, which still lasts. We have a good Opera; and, except for one actress, a bad Comedy. Your Welche players all devote themselves to comic-opera; and platitudes set to music are sung by voices which howl and jar so that the auditors almost have convulsions. Such a spectacle would not have been admired during the great days of the age of Louis XIV. It passes as good in this century of pettiness, when genius is as rare as good sense, when mediocrity in every *genre* announces bad taste, which will probably replunge Europe into a kind of barbarity from which it had been brought by a crowd of great men. As long as we keep Voltaire, there will be nothing to fear; he alone is the Atlas who supports this ruinous edifice with his strength. His tomb will be that of good taste and good letters. Live then, live and grow younger if that is possible; that is the wish of all who are interested in good literature and especially is my wish.

CLXXVIII

From Voltaire

1st March, 1771

Sire,

It is not just that I should quote you as one of our great authors without submitting to you the work in which I take that liberty: I am therefore sending your Majesty my Epistle against Mustapha. I am still implacable towards Mustapha and Fréron. Since the first is an infidel, I am certain of achieving salvation by abusing him; and since the other is a very bad and stupid writer, he rightfully comes under my jurisdiction.

Since the adventures of Rossbach and Lissa there has been nothing, in my opinion, so surprising as the sight of my empress sending four fleets from the north to the Dardanelles. If Hannibal had heard of such an enterprise, he would have ranked his passage of the Alps as a very small matter.

I shall always hate the Turks, the oppressors of Greece, although they have recently ordered watches from my colony; what dull barbarians! For sixty years watches have been sent them from Geneva, and they have not yet learned to make one; they do not even know how to set them right.

I am still very sorry that your Majesty, the emperor and the Venetians have not made an agreement with my empress to drive these villainous Turks out of Europe; it would have been the work of a single campaign and

you would each have shared equally. 'Tis a maxim of geometry that equals added to equals make equals; thus you would have remained exactly in your present situation.

I still persist in believing that such a war would have been much more reasonable than that of 1756, which lacked common sense; but I will now drop my politics, which are equally without common sense, to tell your Majesty that after Easter I hope to pay my court in my hermitage to your nephews, the Princes of Sweden, who have enchanted all Paris.

I hear that D'Argens is dead; I am very sorry; he was one of the ungodly who was most useful to the good cause, though he was a babbler.

CLXXIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 1st May, 1771

The King of Sweden spoke much of the new arrangements in France, of the dismissal of the old Parlement and the creation of a new one. For my part, I have enough to occupy me at home, and I only examine summarily what happens elsewhere.

The Chancellor[1] is said to be a man of genius and distinguished merit; from which I conclude that he has taken the best measures under the circumstances to secure what will be most advantageous and useful

[1] Maupeou.

to the state. But whatever is done in France, the Welche exclaim, criticise, complain and console themselves with a malignant song or a few satirical epigrams.

It is practically the same everywhere. Few men reason and all wish to judge.

Oh! As to war, M. de Voltaire, it is not to be thought of. The Encyclopædists have regenerated me. They have exclaimed so much against the mercenary executioners who turn Europe into a scene of carnage, that in the future I shall take great care not to risk their censures. I do not know if the court of Vienna fears them as much as I respect them; but I dare to hope that it will regulate its policy.

What appears the most probable in politics is often the least so. We are like the blind, we feel our way; and we are not as agile as the Quinze-Vingts[1] who know the streets and squares of Paris perfectly. What is called the art of conjecture is not an art at all, 'tis a game of chance where the cleverest may lose like the most ignorant.

CLXXX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 29th June, 1771

We hear nothing about the Pope here; I think he must be continually in conference with Cardinal Bernis, discussing the fate of the good Jesuit fathers.

[1] The blind in a hospital of Paris.

As an associate of the order, I should go bankrupt in prayers if Rome were so cruel as to suppress them. Nor do we hear any news of the Turk; we do not know what his Highness is doing, but I would wager that it is nothing of importance.

I congratulate you on the new minister chosen by the most Christian king.[1] He is said to be a man of wit; in this case, you will find him a declared protector. If he is such, he will not have the weakness or imbecility to return Avignon to the Pope. One may be a good Catholic and yet strip the vicar of God of those temporal possessions which distract too much from spiritual duties and are sometimes a peril to salvation.

However fertile this age may be in active and intrepid philosophers, eager to spread the truth, you must not be surprised at the superstition you complain of in Switzerland. Its roots plunge in the whole universe; it is the daughter of timidity, weakness and ignorance. This trinity dominates vulgar souls as imperiously as another trinity in theological schools. What contradictions may not be allied in the human mind! The old Prince of Anhalt-Dessau, whom you saw, did not believe in God; but if he met three old women on his way to hunt, he would return home; it was a bad sign. He began nothing on a Monday, because it is an unlucky day. If you asked him the reason, he did not know it. You know what is related of Hobbes; in the daytime he was a sceptic but never slept alone at night for fear of ghosts.

[1] The Duc d'Aiguillon.

Let a knave propose to deceive men, he will never lack dupes. Man is made for error; it enters his mind as it were by itself, and he discovers a few truths only with immense labour. You, who are the apoſtle of truth, receive the homage of that small nook of my mind which is purified from superſtitious ruſt, and redeem my companions from their one-eyed condition. The blind muſt be sent to the Quinze-Vingts. Enlighten what can be enlightened; you sow on barren soil, but future ages will reap a rich harveſt from these fields. The philosopher of Sans Souci salutes the hermit of Ferney.

CLXXXI

From Voltaire

Ferney, 18th October, 1771

Sire,

Then you are like the ocean, whose waves seem ſtayed upon the shore by grains of sand; and the conqueror of Rorssbach, of Neisse etc, etc, cannot speak as a maſter to Swiss prieſts. After that, judge whether the poor Catholic princes have an easy time with the Pope. I do not know if your Majeſty has ever seen a little pamphlet called *The Rights of Men and Usurpations of the Popes;* these are the usurpations of the Holy Father; they are plainly demonſtrated. If you wish, I shall have the honour to send it to you by poſt.

I have taken the liberty of sending your Majeſty the sixth and seventh volumes of the *Queſtions sur*

l'Encyclopédie; but I greatly fear I shall not have the liberty to continue this work. This is indeed a case where liberty might be called power. He who has not the power to act has certainly not the liberty to act; he has only the liberty to say: "I am a slave of nature." Formerly I did all I could to believe that we are free; but I fear I shall be undeceived; to will what one wishes, simply because one wishes it, seems to me a royal prerogative to which wretched mortals should not pretend. Be free as much as you please, Sire, you are the master; but so much honour does not befit me. All that I know certainly is that I do not possess the liberty not to look upon you as the first man of the age, as I regard Catherine II as the first woman, and Mustapha as a poor creature, at least up till now. It seems to me he has been unable to make war or peace. I know kings who have done both; but I shall take care not to tell you who those kings are.

CLXXXII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Sans Souci, 18th November, 1771

You are jesting at me, my good Voltaire; I am neither a hero nor an ocean, but a man who avoids all quarrels which might disorganise society. Liken me rather to a doctor who fits his remedies to the patient's temperament. Fanatics need gentle remedies; violent remedies give them convulsions. That is how I treat

the Geneva preachers, who, in their vehemence are more like the reformers in the 15th century than the present generation.

I am a thousand times obliged to you for the sixth and seventh volumes of your Encyclopédie, which I have received. If Voiture's style were still fashionable, I should tell you that the father of the muses is the author of this work and that the approbation is signed by the god of taste. I was greatly surprised to find my name in it, which you charitably placed there. I found a few parables less obscure than those of the Gospels, and I congratulate myself on having interpreted them. This is an admirable work which I urge you to continue. If it were an academic speech subject to the revision of the Sorbonne, I should perhaps be of another opinion.

Continue to work; send your books to England, to Holland, to Germany and to Russia; I guarantee they will be devoured. Whatever precautions may be taken, they will enter France; and your Welches will be ashamed of not approving what is admired everywhere else.

When your books arrived I had a very violent attack of gout, with arms and feet bound, chained and dead; these books were a great help to me. When reading them I blessed Heaven a thousand times for having sent you into the world.

Remember a man must not bury his talents; nobody hitherto accuses you of that; but I could wish that posterity might lose none of your thoughts, for how many centuries will elapse before there rises up a

genius who adds so much knowledge to so much taste! I am pleading a good cause, and I am speaking to a man so eloquent that, if he glances at the subject, he will at once perceive all the arguments I could bring forward. Let him then continue to extend his reputation, to instruct, to enlighten, to console, to mock, to taunt (according as the subject demands) the public, the zealots and bad authors!

CLXXXIII

From Voltaire

13th November, 1772

Sire,

Yesterday a royal packing-case arrived at my hermitage, and this morning I drank my coffee in a cup such as is not made in the lands of your colleague Kien-Long, the Emperor of China; the tray is of the greatest beauty. I knew that Frederick the Great was a better poet than the good Kien-Long but I did not know that he amused himself by manufacturing in Berlin porcelains superior to those of Kieng-Tsin, Dresden, and Sèvres; this amazing man must then eclipse his rivals in everything he undertakes. However, I will confess that among those who were with me at the opening of the packing-case, there were critics who did not approve the crown of laurel which surrounds the lyre of Apollo on the admirable cover of the prettiest dish imaginable. They said: "How

can it happen that a great man, so well known for his scorn of display and false pride, should think of putting his arms on the cover of a dish!" I replied: "It must be a fancy of the workman; kings leave everything to the caprice of artists. Louis XIV did not order a slave to be put at the foot of his statue; he did not order Marshal de la Feuillade to engrave the famous inscription, *To the Immortal Man;* and when we see in a hundred places, *Frederico immortali*, we know that Frederick the Great did not imagine this device and that he let the world talk."

There is also an Amphion carried by a dolphin. I know that once a dolphin, which was no doubt a lover of poetry, saved Amphion from the sea where those who envied him tried to drown him.

And so it is in the north that all the arts flourish to-day! It is there that the finest porcelain dishes are made, provinces are partitioned by a stroke of the pen, confederations and senates dissolved in two days, and that the confederates and their Notre Dame are most amusingly laughed at.

Sire, we Welches have our merit too; comic-operas have caused Molière to be forgotten, marionettes make Racine fail, as well as financiers wiser than Colbert and generals whom Turenne does not approach.

The one thing that distresses me is that I hear you have caused a renewal of the conferences between Mustapha and my Empress; I should much prefer it if you helped her to drive from the Bosphorus those villainous Turks, those enemies of the fine arts, those

extinguishers of beautiful Greece. You might find on the way some province to round off your territory, for after all we must amuse ourselves; we cannot always read, philosophise, make verses and music.

CLXXXIV

From Voltaire

Ferney, 8th December, 1772

Sire,

Your most amusing poem on the Confederates gave me the idea of a very dismal tragedy entitled the *Lois de Minos*, which is to be hissed very soon by the Welches. You will ask me why a work so gay as yours turned with me to a source of boredom. The reason is that I am far from you; that I no longer have the honour to sup with you; that I am no longer animated by you and that the purest waters take on the taste of the land through which they flow.

However, since the confederates of Crete have some resemblance to the confederates of Poland, and still more to those of Sweden, I shall take the liberty in a few days of laying the soporific tragedy at your feet by means of the post; and I beg your Majesty's pardon beforehand for the boring I shall cause you. But there is no king who can so easily preserve himself from boredom by throwing a dull book in the fire.

My contemporary Thiériot is dead. I am afraid

it will be difficult to replace him; he was exactly the man you needed.

I have received a letter from one of your officers named Morival, who is at Wesel; he informs me that he is deeply touched by your kindness and that he would shed all his blood for your Majesty. You know that this Morival comes from Abbeville, that he is the son of a certain Président d'Étallonde, the most stupid miser in Abbeville. You know that at the age of seventeen he was condemned with the chevalier de la Barre, by Welche monsters, to the most horrible torture because he sang a song and did not raise his hat to a procession of Capucins. That is worthy of the nation of tiger-monkeys who committed the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew; it was worthy of Thorn in 1724; and it will never happen in your dominions. Some monk of Oliva will perhaps groan at it and will privately damn you for abandoning the Lord's cause. For my part, I bless you and shudder every day at the execrable event at Abbeville.

I dare to say to your Majesty that I think Morival is worthy of being employed in your armies and that I should like him to be able, through his services and his promotion, to confound the tiger-monkeys who were guilty of such execrable fanaticism towards him. I should like to see him at the head of a company of grenadiers in the streets of Abbeville, making his judges tremble and forgiving them. For my part, I do not forgive them, this abomination is always a weight on my heart; I must re-read some of your verse-epistles to regain a little gaiety.

CLXXXV

From Voltaire

Ferney, 22nd December, 1772

Sire,

The letters you dictate to M. de Catt are alone sufficient for immortality; but you know better than anyone that immortality is an enchanted castle we see from afar but never enter.

When we are no more, what does it matter to us what is done with our wretched bodies and pretended souls, and what is said about them? Yet this illusion seduces us all, beginning with you on your throne and ending with me on my pallet-bed at the foot of the Jura mountains.

Yet it is plain that the deist or atheist who wrote Ecclesiastes is right; it is certain that a dead lion is not worth a living dog; that we should enjoy life and that all the rest is vanity.

'Tis most amusing that this little Epicurean book should be sacred among us because it is Jewish.

No doubt you will take up the side of immortality against me and you will defend your property. You will say it is a pleasure you enjoyed during your life; already you form in your mind a most entertaining image of the comparison which will be made between you and one of your colleagues; for example, Mustapha. You laugh when you see Mustapha, doing nothing except lie with his odalisques, who make fun of him, beaten by a lady born in your neighbourhood,

deceived, robbed, scorned by his ministers, knowing nothing, understanding nothing. I confess that posterity will not have a more enormous contrast; but I am afraid that if that fat pig is healthy he is happier than you are. Try to let it be otherwise; take as much health and pleasure as glory in the year 1773 and the fifty following years if that may be; and may your Majesty continue your favours to me for the moments I still have to live at the foot of the Alps. 'Tis not there I should have wished to live and die.

The will of his sacred Majesty Chance be done!

CLXXXVI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 3rd January, 1773

It is very true that when we examine what glory is, it is reduced to very little. To be judged by the ignorant and esteemed by imbeciles, to hear one's name spoken by a rabble who approve, reject, love or hate without reason—that is not anything to be proud of. Yet what would become of virtuous and praiseworthy actions if we did not cherish fame?

"The gods are for Cæsar, but Cato follows Pompey."

Honest folk wish to deserve the approval of Cato. Those who have deserved well of their country have been encouraged in their labours by the prejudices of

reputation; but for the good of humanity it is essential to have a clear and well-defined idea of what is praiseworthy; people fall into strange errors from a mistaken idea of reputation.

Do good to men and they will bless you; that is true glory. No doubt everything that will be said of us after our death will be as indifferent to us as everything that is said of the builder of the Tower of Babel; but, as we are accustomed to exist, this does not prevent us from being sensitive to the judgment of posterity. Kings should be more so than private men, because it is the only tribunal they have to fear.

If a man is born with some sensibility, he lays claim to the esteem of his countrymen; he desires to shine, he does not wish to be confounded with the vulgar herd. This instinct is a result of the ingredients made use of by nature to mould us; I have my share of it. Yet I can assure you that it never entered my head to compare myself with my colleagues, either with Mustapha or any other; it would be a puerile, a middle-class vanity; I attend only to my own affairs. To humiliate myself I often compare myself with the archtype of the Stoics; and I then confess with Memnon that fragile creatures like us are not made to attain perfection.

If somebody collected all the prejudices which govern the world, the catalogue would fill a large folio. Let us content ourselves with fighting those which are harmful to society and do not let us destroy useful as well as agreeable errors.

Yet, though I confess I have a taste for glory, I do not flatter myself that princes have the largest share of reputation; on the contrary, I think that great authors who can mingle the useful with the agreeable, instruct while they amuse, will enjoy a more durable glory, because the life of good princes passes wholly in action and the vicissitudes and the crowds of events which follow efface those which went before; while great authors are not only the benefactors of their contemporaries but of all ages.

Notwithstanding all this, I shall labour none the less for glory even though I succumb, because at sixty-one a man is incorrigible and because it is proved that he who does not desire the esteem of his contemporaries is unworthy of it. Here is a sincere confession of what I am and of what nature wished me to be. If the patriarch of Ferney, who thinks as I do, considers my case a mortal sin, I ask his absolution. I shall await his sentence humbly; and even if he condemns me, I shall not love him any the less.

CLXXXVII

From Voltaire

Ferney, 1st February, 1773

Sire,

I have thanked you for your porcelain; the king, my master, has none finer; moreover, he has not sent me any. But I thank you much more for what you take from me than I am grateful for what

you give me. In your last letter you deprive me of exactly nine years; our Controller General has never made such large cuts. Your Majesty has the goodness to compliment me on my age of seventy. This is how kings are always deceived. I am seventy-nine, if you please, and shall soon be eighty. So I shall not see the destruction, which I desire so passionately, of those wretched Turks who imprison their wives and do not cultivate the fine arts.

CLXXXVIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 29th February, 1773

I have received your letter and your charming verses, which certainly give the lie to your age. No, I shall not believe you merely on your word; either you are still young or you have clipped the wings of Time.

Perhaps you will still have the pleasure of seeing the Musulmans driven out of Europe; the peace has just failed for the second time; new combinations give rise to new conjectures. Your Welches are very troublesome. For my part, who am a disciple of the Encyclopœdists, I preach universal peace like a good disciple of the late Abbé de Saint Pierre; and perhaps I shall be no more successful than he was. I see it is easier for men to do evil than good and that the inevitable chain of causes drags us along in spite of ourselves,

and plays with our plans as a strong wind does with moving sand.

This does not prevent the continuation of the ordinary run of things. We are arranging the chaos of our anarchy; and our bishops retain incomes of eighty thousand crowns and the abbés of seven thousand. The apostles did not have so much. We are treating them in such a manner that they may be free from worldly cares, in order that they may devote themselves without any distractions to attaining the heavenly Jerusalem, which is their true country.

CLXXXIX

From Voltaire

Ferney, 22nd April, 1773

No doubt, Sire, you have the same kindness for old Baron von Poellnitz as for me. Hades has respected him, and no doubt he respects you still more; you will live long enough to extend your dominions still further, for I defy you to extend your glory; as to your Baron, he must be very proud of being sung by you, and very happy that he has not paid his passage to Charon.

I thank your Majesty for continuing your protection to the majesty of Julian who is certainly a most respectable majesty, in spite of the insolent Gregory and the impertinent Cyril.

I do not think that the Welches wish to get themselves talked about so soon; a great deal of ready money must be wasted now for the amusement of ravaging the world, and these gentlemen have not got it; but, if ever this misfortune happens, I should take the liberty of recommending to you one Morival, who is serving in one of your regiments at Wesel. I would beg you to send him to Abbeville in Picardy, to break on the wheel those judges who six years ago condemned him and the Chevalier de la Barre to the ordinary and extraordinary torture, to amputation of the right hand and of the tongue, and to be cast alive into the fire, because they did not raise their hats to a procession of monks. The Chevalier de la Barre suffered part of this little Christian penitence; the more fortunate Morival went to serve a king who sacrifices nobody to monks, who does not tear out young men's tongues, and who makes a better use than anyone of his tongue, his pen and his sword.

Assuming that Thorn is in your power, I dare to ask justice of you from the Holy Virgin Mary, to whom so many young scholars were sacrificed in the year 1724. This good woman of Bethlehem never expected that one day so many sacrifices would be made to her and her son. Human blood has flowed for them a thousand times more than for the pagan gods, and you see that the author of the notes on *Les Lois de Minos* was right; but with the Welches nothing is so dangerous as to be in the right.

CXC

From Voltaire

Ferney, 4th September, 1773

Sire,

If your old Baron danced at the age of eighty-six, I flatter myself that you will dance better at a hundred. It is just that you should long dance to the sound of your flute and your lyre, after you have made so many people dance in and out of cadence to the sound of your trumpets. True, it is not the custom for people of your sort to live very long. Charles XII, who would have been an excellent captain in one of your regiments; Gustavus Adolphus, who would have been one of your generals; Waldstein, to whom you would not have confided your armies; the great Elector, who was rather a precursor of the great; all did not live the full age of man. You know what happened to Cæsar, who was as clever as you, and to Alexander, who became a drunkard because he had nothing else to do; but you will live long in spite of your attacks of gout, because you are sober, and because you can temper the fire which animates you and prevent it from devouring you.

Your judgment on the posthumous work of Helvetius does not surprise me; I expected it; you only love the truth. His work will do more harm than good to philosophy; I saw with pain that it was only rubbish, an undigested mass of truths and acknowledged errors. One obvious truth is the justice the

author does you; but there is no longer any merit in that. Moreover, there are many brilliant little diamonds sewed here and there to be found in this irregular compellation. They gave me great pleasure and consoled me for the faults of the whole work.

I do not know whether I am wrong about the King of Poland, but I think he acted well in confiding himself to your Majesty. He has justified the old Greek proverb: "The half is better than the whole"; he still has enough to be happy. Where should we be if there were no happiness in this world except for those who possess lands three hundred leagues long and broad? Mustapha has too many; I still wish he might be relieved of the labour of governing a part of Europe. People may say that the Mahommedan religion counter-balances the Greek religion and that the Greek religion is a counterpoise to the Papist religion; I should prefer you to act as a counterpoise. I am always distressed to see a Pasha trampling under foot the ashes of Themistocles and Alcibiades. It pains me as much as to see cardinals caressing their mignons on the tomb of Marcus Aurelius.

Seriously, I cannot understand why the Queen Empress has not sold her plate and given her last crown to her son the Emperor, your friend (if there are friends among you), for him to go at the head of an army to await Catherine II at Adrianople. This enterprise seems to me so natural, so easy, so suitable, so fine, that I cannot see why it has not been carried out; especially as there would be a large bonus for your

Majesty in this bargain. Everyone has his chimera, and this is mine.

> Après quoi je rentre en moi-même,
> Et suis Gros-Jean comme devant.[1]

Gros-Jean in his solitude, planting, clearing, building, establishing a little colony, working, pondering, doubting, doting, suffering, dying, most sincerely regretting you, throws himself with admiration at your feet.

CXCI

From Voltaire

Ferney, 22nd September, 1773

Sire,

I must tell you that, in spite of my former caprices, I felt recently how much I am attached to your Majesty and to your house. The Duchess of Wurtemberg, like so many others has been weak enough to believe that health is to be found at Lausanne, that Doctor Tissot gives it to those who pay for it and so, as you know, she has come to Lausanne; and I, who am really much more ill than she is and than all the princesses who think Tissot is Æsculapius, had not the strength to leave my house. Mme de Wurtemberg, knowing my sentiments for the memory of her mother, the Margravine of Beyreuth, was graciously pleased to visit my hermitage and to spend

[1] After which I retire into myself, and am Gros-Jean as before. La Fontaine.

two days there. I should have recognised her, even if I had not been forewarned; she has her mother's face, with your eyes.

You heroes who govern the world do not allow yourselves to be overcome by tender emotions; you feel it as we do, but you preserve your decorum. But we poor mortals yield to every impression; I wept when I spoke to her of you and of the princess her mother; and though she is the niece of the first captain in Europe she could not restrain her tears. She seems to me to possess the wit and graces of your house, and to be more attached to you than to her husband. I think she is returning to Beyreuth where she will find another princess of a different kind; this is Mlle de Clairon, who cultivates natural history and is the Margrave's philosopher.

I do not know where you are at present, Sire; the gazettes make you out continually on the move. I do not know if you are giving blessings in one of the bishoprics of your new dominions or in your abbey of Oliva; I passionately hope that the nonconformists will multiply under your standards. I hear that several Jesuits have become Socinians; God reward them for it! It would be amusing if they built a church to Saint Servet; that is the only revolution we lack.

I give up my fine hopes of seeing the Mahommedans driven out of Europe, and the re-birth of eloquence, poetry, music, painting, sculpture, in Athens; neither you nor the emperor will fly to the Bosphorus; you allow the Russians to be beaten at Silistrie and my

empress to consolidate for a time in the land of Thoas and Iphigenia. In short you will not go on a crusade. I think you much superior to Godefroi de Bouillon; you would have had over him the pleasure of making fun of the Turks in pretty verses as well as of the Polish confederate; but I see you care neither for the terrestial nor the heavenly Jerusalem; a pity.

CXCII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 9th October, 1773

I perceive with regret that it is nearly twenty years since you left here; your memory recalls me to your imagination such as I was then; but if you saw me, instead of finding a young man who looked as if he was at a ball, you would only find a feeble and decrepit old man. Every day I lose a particle of my existence and every day I travel imperceptibly towards that dwelling place from which no one has brought back news.

The Catholic Cathedral at Berlin is to be inaugurated. It will be consecrated by the Bishop of Varmia. This spectacle, so strange to us, attracts a large crowd of curious people. In the diocese of this Bishop is the tomb of Copernicus, to whom, as is proper, I shall erect a mausoleum. Among the crowd of errors spread in his time, he was the only man who taught

some useful truths. He was fortunate; he was not persecuted.

I return to the King of Poland about whom you speak. I know that Europe in general thinks that the partition of Poland is the result of political manœuvres which are attributed to me; but nothing could be falser. After having proposed in vain different compromises, we were compelled to this partition as the only means of avoiding a general war. Appearances are deceptive, and the public only judges by them. What I say is as true as the forty-eighth proposition of Euclid.

I have read the article on War and I trembled. How can a prince, whose troops are dressed in coarse blue cloth and whose hats are trimmed with white braid, after having made them turn to the right and to the left, lead them to glory without deserving the honourable title of a brigand-chief, since he is only followed by a heap of idlers obliged by necessity to become mercenary executioners in order to carry on under him the honest occupation of highwayman? Have you forgotten that war is a scourge which, collecting them all together, adds to them all possible crimes? You see that after having read these wise maxims, a man who cares even a little for his reputation, should avoid the epithets which are only given to the vilest scoundrels.

How many reasons there are for maintaining the peace we now enjoy! It would be madness to disturb its duration.

CXCIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 24th October, 1773

It is more than a month since I returned from my travels. I went to Prussia to abolish serfdom, to reform barbarous laws, to promulgate more reasonable ones; to open a canal which joins the Vistula, the Netze, the Varte, the Oder and the Elbe; to re-build the towns destroyed during the plague of 1709; to re-claim twenty miles of marsh land and to establish some policing in a country where the very name is unknown. From there I went to Silesia to console my poor Ignatians for the rigours of the Court of Rome, to confirm their order, to make them into a corps in different provinces where I maintain them, and to make them useful to the country by directing their schools to the education of the young, to which they are entirely devoting themselves. Moreover, I have arranged to build sixty villages in upper Silesia, where there remain some uncultivated lands; each village to contain twenty families. I have constructed main roads in the mountains for the facilitation of commerce and have re-built two burnt towns; they were of wood, they will be in brick and stone quarried from the mountain.

I will say nothing about the troops to you; this topic is too much prohibited at Ferney for me to touch on it.

You will realize that in doing all this I have not ſtood about with my arms crossed.

A propos crosses, neither the emperor nor I will crusade againſt the crescent; there are no more relics to carry off from Jerusalem. We hope that peace will be made this winter; and then we believe in the proverb which says: "Live and let live". The peace has scarcely laſted ten years; we muſt keep it as long as we can without risk and, neither more nor less, be in a condition not to be surprised by some brigand-chief leading hired assassins.

This is not the syſtem of Richelieu or of Mazarin; but is the syſtem of many nations, and the chief object of the magiſtrates who govern them.

CXCIV

From Voltaire

Ferney, 28th October, 1773

I did not propose, Sire, twenty campaigns to you, I only proposed one or two; and even then it was againſt the enemies of Jesus Chriſt and all the fine arts. I said: "He protects the Jesuits, he will certainly protect the Virgin Mary againſt Mahomet, and no doubt the good Virgin will give him two or three provinces to choose from, as a reward for so holy an action."

I have juſt re-read the Article on War, about which your pacific Majeſty is good enough to speak to me;

it is certainly a little insolent from excess of humanity; but I beg you to consider that all these insults can only fall on the Turks, who came from the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea down to Naples, and who on the way seized the Holy Land and even the tomb of Jesus Christ, who was never buried. In a word, I am as like as two peas to that madman Peter the Hermit, who preached the Crusade. The emperor of the Romans, whom you love, and who considers himself your disciple, cannot complain of me; with a stroke of the pen I gave him a very fine kingdom. Within ten years a Greek opera might have been played at Constantinople. God did not bless my intentions, Christian though they were; at least philosophers will bless you for erecting a mausoleum to Copernicus, at a time when your friend Mustapha has the philosophy of Aristotle taught at Stamboul. You will not re-build Athens, but you raise a monument to reason and genius.

When I begged you to be the restorer of the fine arts in Greece, my request did not go so far as to beg you to re-establish the Athenian democracy; I do not like government by the rabble. You would have given the government of Greece to M. de Lentulus, or to some other general who would have prevented the new Greeks from committing as many follies as their ancestors. But I finally abandon all my plans. You prefer the Port of Dantzig to that of the Piraeus; I think that at bottom your Majesty is right and that in the present state of Europe the port of Dantzig is more important than the other.

CXCV

From Voltaire

Ferney, 8th November, 1773

The canal, the towns re-built, the marshes drained, the villages established, serfdom abolished, are worthy of Marcus Aurelius or Julian. I say Julian, for I look upon him as the greatest of emperors and am still indignant with La Bletterie, who only half justifies him, and who is supposed to be impartial because he does not lavish so many insults and calumnies as Gregory of Nazianzus and Theodoret.

I bless you in my village because you have built so many; I bless you on the edge of my marsh because you have drained so much; I bless you with my workmen because you have delivered so many from slavery and you have changed them into men. Gengis-Khan and Tamburlain won battles like you, they conquered more territory than you; but they devastated and you ameliorate. I do not know whether they would have sheltered Jesuits; but I am sure you will make them useful without allowing them to be dangerous. They say that Anthony journeyed from Brundisium to Rome in a chariot drawn by lions; you harness foxes to yours, but you put a bit in their mouth; and, if it were necessary you would put fire to their backsides like Samson, after having tied their tails together. What troubles me is that you did not establish a church of Socinians as you are establishing

several for Jesuits; yet there are still Socinians in Poland. England is full of them, we have them in Switzerland; Julian would certainly have favoured them; they hate what he hated, they scorn what he scorned, and they are honest folk as he was. Moreover, having been so much persecuted by the Poles, they have some right to your protection.

CXCVI

From Voltaire

Ferney, 8th December, 1773

Sire,

A fair lady of Paris,[1] (about whom you care nothing) asserts that you are angry with me because I sent your Majesty to the devil; and I maintain that you will forgive me, and that Beelzebub himself will be very pleased, seeing that there was never a more devilish person than you at the head of an army, either in arranging a plan of campaign or in carrying it out, or in repairing an accident.

It is true I do not at all like your occupation of hero, but I revere it; it is not for me to judge M. Guibert's *La Tactique*. I do not understand these high matters; I only know that they concern you, with reason, since you are the first of tacticians; and I add the first of politicians, for you have just acquired a fair kingdom without having killed anybody; and you are not only

[1] Mme Necker.

supplied with bishoprics and abbeys, not only the general of the Jesuits after having been the general of an army, but you construct canals as they do in China and you enrich the kingdom you procured by a stroke of the pen. What is there left for you to do? Nothing, except to live long and enjoy it all.

Since your Majesty will probably receive my little parcel in the Christmas holidays and since the god of peace will be born within three weeks, I commend myself to him to obtain my forgiveness from you and for you to forgive me all the abuse I have spoken of your Majesty and my cordial hatred for your Cæsarean occupation. Cæsar, as you know, forgave his enemies when he had conquered them; and you will have a similar clemency for me after you have made fun of me.

CXCVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

4th January, 1774

The lady in Paris was certainly wrong and you guessed rightly in thinking I should not be angry with what you have just written. Love and hatred cannot be commanded and everyone has a right to feel as he may about this subject; yet it must be admitted that the ancient philosophers, who did not like war, were more sparing in their terms than our modern philosophers who, since Racine placed the

word executioner in his elegant verses, think that this word had obtained the privilege of nobility and employ it inconsiderately in their prose; but I confess I would as soon declaim against ague as against war, 'tis time wasted; governments let the cynics bray and continue in their course; and the ague does not pay any attention. Out of all this there remain some well-turned verses which, to the astonishment of Europe, bear witness that your talent does not age. Preserve this rejuvenated spirit and even if you should satirise me in stinging verses at the age of a hundred, I guarantee beforehand that I shall not be angry and that the patriarch of Ferney may say anything he pleases to the philosopher of Sans Souci.

CXCVIII

From Voltaire

January, 1774

Sire,

Although I sent you to all the devils, you and Cyrus and the great Gustavus, etc, I now propose something divine to your Majesty, or rather something very human and very worthy of you. This is not a jest; but a very real favour I beg you to confer upon me.

The young gentleman who is serving under the name of Morival as a lieutenant in Eichmann's regiment at Wesel cannot inherit from his father and

mother so long as he is in the bonds of the criminal procedure and the abominable judgment delivered against him at Abbeville when he was only about sixteen; he is the son of a President of Abbeville and his name is d'Étallonde. Since he has been in your service at Wesel he has won golden opinions. I know he is one of the bravest and wisest officers you have. His whole ambition is to live and die in your Majesty's service; he will never have another king as another master. But it is dreadful that he should still remain condemned to the same torture in which the Chevalier de la Barre died—the Chevalier who wrote a little commentary on your art of war.

These judicial assassinations will forever dishonour the Parlement de Paris, the enemy of its king, of reason and of justice, which has not been sufficiently punished by dismissal.

It is desired to obtain either letters of pardon for Morival or the reversal of the sentence which condemned him. I therefore beg your Majesty with the utmost urgency, to grant Morival leave of absence for one year, during which he will live with me. I will be answerable for his person. I will help him to make as many recruits as you please; there is not a place in the world where soldiers can be more easily raised than in this little canton, which is precisely one league from Switzerland, from Geneva, from Savoy and Franche-Comté. In spite of my great age I will myself undertake to help him to furnish you with the most handsome men and to choose those of the best behaviour.

I ask you as a favour to send him leave of absence for a year; he will set out immediately and perhaps will return to Wesel at the end of three months.

If he cannot obtain what he wishes in France, he will none the less be obliged to your Majesty and you will have done what would have been done by the Cyruses and Gustavuses of whom I have spoken so ill.

CXCIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

9th February, 1774

Your Tactique gave me a nice attack of gout from which I am not yet recovered; but this does not prevent me from replying to you because I know that great lords must be promptly obeyed. You ask for one Morival, otherwise Étallonde, who is an officer at Wesel; he shall have permission to go to Ferney for a year, and if you like you can nominate him commander of your Pretorian Guard. He will do nothing and he will get no recruits; but I warn you that since he is under sentence in France it is for you to see that he is safe at Versoix; and I confess I do not think you have sufficient influence to obtain his pardon. The Chevalier de la Barre and he were accused of the same offence; after one of them has been publicly executed, it is contrary to the King of France's dignity to pardon the other without appearing to be in

contradiction to himself. I have not heard that the Chevalier de la Barre's judges have been punished; I have not been told that measures have been taken against any of the assessors of the court at Abbeville. Therefore, unless you are governing France from Ferney, I cannot think you will obtain any favour for this young man. The only advantage he will derive from his journey will be that he will be weaned by you from any prejudices he may have in favour of his profession; but I abandon him to you and, if you should convert him, it will not be hard for me to replace him by another. I must inform you that in addition there are two boot-blacks at Magdeburg, who were once soldiers in the regiment de Picardie; and at Berlin a wig-maker who served in M. de Broglie's armies; they are wholly at your service if you want them at Ferney to increase the colony you are founding there. I await your decision; and though I have fallen into your hatred and disgrace, I pray Apollo and his son Æsculapius, the god of medicine, to keep you in their holy guard.

CC

From Voltaire

Ferney, 26th April, 1774

Sire,

Suffer me to speak to your Majesty of the young officer you permitted to visit me. I thought

I should find him a young Frenchman with some of that light-headedness with which our nation is so much reproached. I found a most circumspect and discreet man, with the gentlest manners passionately in love with the profession of arms to which he has devoted himself.

I do not know if he will succeed in his enterprise; but he has told me twenty times he would never leave your service, even for the most brilliant and most solid fortune in France. I was insufficiently informed of his family and of this astounding affair; he is a gentleman of very good family, a son of the first magistrate in the town where he was born. I have obtained the documents of his case. I cannot recover from my surprise when I see what his fault was and his sentence. He is only charged legally with having passed rapidly, with his hat on his head, forty yards from a procession of monks and of having sung with several other young men a bawdy song written more than a hundred years ago.

It is inconceivable that, in a country which calls itself civilised and claims to possess several amiable citizens, a young man emerging from childhood should be condemned to the punishment of parracides, for something which is not even a peccadillo, and which would not have been punished with a week's imprisonment even in Rome or Madrid.

CCI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 19th June, 1774

So the good Louis XV has gone post-haste to the Eternal Father. I am sorry for him; he was an honest man, whose only fault was that he was a king. His successor is beginning very prudently and gives the Welches hopes of good government. I wish he had treated the Dubarry more gently, out of respect for his grandfather.

If the monks influence this young man, the rakes will carry rosaries and the initiates of Venus will be covered with agnus Dei. Some bishop will have to take up Morival's cause and a Picpus must plead it. I hear a storm menaces the philosophers. I shall await calmly in my little corner the novelties and events which will be produced by this new reign, ready to admire anything that is admirable, and to reflect on what is the contrary, interested only in the fate of the philosophers and chiefly in that of the patriarch of Ferney.

CCII

From Voltaire

July, 1774

Sire,

It is true that the God-swallowers may obtain influence in France; perhaps the amiable daughter

of the lady you call "the devotee" may contribute more than anybody to strengthen this dangerous influence. I have not sufficiently exalted what soul is left me to read the future; but I dread everything. Old men are timid; you alone will increase in courage as you grow old, but then you are not formed like other men.

The person your Majesty mentions had, as you say, the defect of being a king. Like so many others, he was little fitted for his place, indifferent to everything, but easily piqued in little things personal to himself; he could never forgive me for having left him for another, who was truly a king; and I never supposed he would care whether I was or was not on the list of his servants. I respect his memory, and I wish you a life just double as long as his.

CCIII

From Voltaire

16th August, 1774

Whether I lament or not at seeing the country of Homer a prey to Turks from the banks of the Hercanian Sea, whether I beg you to be so kind as to expel them and to place the Alcibiades in their place, makes no difference, and the Turks will never know it. But if it occurs to you to wish to extend your power towards the east or the west, the matter then becomes serious and woe to them that oppose it!

The *Épître à Ninon* is really by Count Schowalow, nephew of the Schowalow who was the last lover of the Empress Elizabeth. This nephew has been brought up in Paris and has a great deal of wit and taste. Fifty years ago we should never have expected a Russian to write French verse so well; but he was forestalled by a king of the North who has set him a great example. I do not know the satire entitled *Louis XV aux Champs Élysées*, and I do not believe it exists. There has appeared a collection of letters by the late Lord Chesterfield to a bastard son whom he loved as Mme de Sévigné loved her daughter.

You are very frequently mentioned in these letters, and the same justice is rendered you that will be rendered by posterity.

Lord Chesterfield's approval is of very great weight, not only because he belonged to a nation which never thinks of flattering kings but because he has written with more grace perhaps than any other Englishman. His admiration for you cannot be suspected; he never dreamed that his letters would be printed after he and his son were dead. They are now being translated into French in Holland; so your Majesty will soon see them. You will read the only Englishman who has ever recommended the art of pleasing as the first duty in life.

I always remember that my greatest passion was to please you; now it is not to displease you. Everything grows weaker with age; the more we feel our decay, the more modest we are.

CCIV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 19th September, 1774

You say you are content if you are not hated; and I cannot prevent myself from loving you, in spite of your little infidelities. After your death, there will be no one to replace you; it will be the end of good letters in France. My last passion will be the love of letters; it is with pain that I observe their decay, either from lack of genius or corruption of taste, which seems to be gaining ground. Some centuries from now they will translate the good authors of the time of Louis XIV as we translate those of the age of Pericles and of Augustus. I consider myself happy at having come into the world in a time when I could enjoy the last authors who made that splendid age so famous. Those who come after us will be born with less enthusiasm for the masterpieces of the human mind, because the time of effervescence is over. It is limited to the first achievements, which are followed by satiety and the taste for good or bad novelties.

Live then, as long as you can, and like another Atlas sustain on your bowed shoulders the honour of letters and of the human mind.

CCV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Berlin, 28th December, 1774

The ages when nations produce Turennes, Condés, Bossuets, Bayles, and Corneilles do not follow each other closely; such were the ages of Pericles, of Cicero, of Louis XIV. Everything must prepare men's minds for such an effervescence. It appears to be an effort of nature, followed by a period of repose when nature has lavished at once its fecundity and its abundance. No sovereign can contribute to the creation of so brilliant an epoch. Nature must place geniuses in such a way that those who have received them can employ them in the station they have to occupy in the world. And misplaced genius is often like abortive seed which produces nothing.

In all countries where the cult of Plutus overtops that of Minerva we must expect to find fat purses and empty heads. Honest mediocrity is the most suitable condition for states; riches lead to softness and corruption; not that a republic like that of Sparta could endure in our days, but with a happy medium between necessity and superfluity, the national character retains something more masculine, more fit for application, for work, and all that elevates the soul. Great wealth either makes niggards or prodigals.

Perhaps you will liken me to La Fontaine's fox, who thought the grapes were sour when he could not reach them. No, it is not that, but reflections borne in upon me from a knowledge of history and my own experience. You will object that the English are opulent and yet have produced great men. I agree; but the islanders in general have a different character from the Continentals, and English manners are not so softened as those of other Europeans. Their form of government again differs from ours; and all these together form different combinations, without taking into account the fact that this nation is a nation of sailors and therefore has harsher manners than those which are seen among us other terrestrial animals.

CCVI

From Voltaire

1st May, 1775

Sire,

Your last letter is a masterpiece of reason, of wit, of taste and goodness.

I feel a joy mingled with tenderness when strangers who come to see me bow before your portrait, saying: "So this is that great man!"

It is true that at the present time we may notice an emulation among nearly all the sovereigns to distinguish themselves by great and useful institutions. It even appears that in some courts superstition is

diminishing. But where is the prince who approaches your philosophy? By my faith, it is perfectly true that you think like Marcus Aurelius and write like Cicero, in a language which is not your own. The familiar letters of Cicero are not equal to those of Frederick the Great. You are gayer than he, as you are a better general, although he did fight once in the same place as Alexander.

I thank your Majesty for your good intentions towards Divus d'Etallundus, martyr of philosophy; there is as much grandeur and virtue in protecting such martyrs as there is infamy and barbarity in making them.

I hear that your Majesty is going to Silesia, with the princes of Wurtemburg. I do not know whether it is the reigning duke, or Prince Louis, or Prince Eugene, or one of his children; if it were the reigning duke, I should dare to ask you to use your influence with him on my behalf. I should like to have this new proof of your favour before I die; I should then sleep in the peace of the Lord. I am ending my life by establishing a colony at Ferney. Your Majesty may remember that my first plan was to establish it at Cleves. I hoped then to be so happy as to throw myself at your feet. It is a consolation with which I can no longer flatter myself.

CCVII

From Voltaire

21st June, 1775

My letter will perhaps be importunate in the midst of your vast occupations; but you have time for the smallest as for the most important affairs. M. de Catinet said that his hero was the man who could play a game of skittles immediately after winning or losing a battle. You do not play skittles; you write verses on the day of a battle; you take your flute when your drums are beating to arms; you deign to write me charming things when you are promoting generals. I admire you in every way and, admiring you, I expect everything from your noble heart.

I am told that the coronation of the most Christian king was not so brilliant as the French hoped, accustomed as they are to the magic of Servandoni and the music of Gluck. The coronation is a very curious sight. The poor king is made to lie down flat in his shirt before the priests, who make him swear to maintain all the rights of the Church, and only allow him to be dressed when he has taken this oath. There are some people who claim that kings should make priests take an oath to them; it seems to me that Frederick the Great does so in Silesia and in Western Prussia.

CCVIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 24th July, 1775

Our Germans have the ambition of enjoying the advantages of the fine arts in their turn; they are striving to equal Athens, Rome, Florence and Paris. Whatever love I may have for my country, I cannot say that they have succeeded hitherto; they lack two things, language and taste. The language is too verbose; in good society French is spoken, and a few school ushers and professors cannot give it the politeness and easy turn it can only acquire in the best society. Add to this the diversity of idioms; each province maintains its own, and up till now no preference has been decided. In the matter of taste, the Germans are entirely lacking; they have not yet been able to imitate the authors of the age of Augustus; they make a vicious mixture of Roman, English, French and Teuton taste; they still lack that fine discernment which seizes upon beauties where it finds them and is able to distinguish the mediocre from the perfect, the noble from the sublime, and to apply each in its proper place. So long as there are plenty of "R"s in the words of their poetry they think their verses are harmonious and usually it is only balderdash in turgid phrases. In the matter of history, they would not omit the least circumstance, even if it were unnecessary.

Their best works are in law. As to philosophy, nobody has meddled with it since the genius of Leibnitz and the great monad of Wolff. They think they are successful with the theatre; but hitherto nothing perfect has appeared. At the present time Germany is like the France of the time of Francis I. The taste for literature is beginning to spread; we must wait for nature to bring forth men of true genius, like those under the ministeries of Richelieu and Mazarin. The soil which has produced one Leibnitz may produce others. I shall not see these fair days of my country, but I foresee their possibility. You will say that all this may be perfectly indifferent to you, and that it is easy for me to play the prophet by extending the accomplishment of the prophecy to a time as far off as I can. That is my way of prophesying, and the surest of all, since nobody can contradict me. For my part, I am consoled by having lived in the age of Voltaire; that suffices me.

CCIX

From Voltaire

3rd August, 1775

It is a rather singular thing, Sire, that Lekain and Mlle Clairon should both be in attendance upon the house of Brandenburg. But while the talent for reciting French has obtained them your favour at

Sans Souci, Gluck has come to teach Paris music. Our Orpheuses come from Germany, if our Rosciuses come to you from France. But where does philosophy come from? From Potsdam, Sire, where you lodged her and whence you have sent her through the greater part of Europe.

I do not know whether our King will follow in your footsteps but I know that he has taken philosophers as his ministers, with the exception of one who has the misfortune to be devout.

We are losing taste, but we are acquiring thought; there is especially a M. Turgot, who would be worthy to converse with your Majesty; the priests are in despair. This is the beginning of a great revolution. However, they do not yet dare to declare themselves openly, they are undermining in secret the ancient palace of imposture, founded one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five years ago.

CCX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 13th August, 1775

I congratulate your nation on Louis XVI's choice of ministers. "The nations," said one of the ancients, "will only be happy when philosophers are Kings." If your ministers are not altogether kings, they possess an equivalent authority. Your king has

the best intentions; he means well; nothing is more to be feared on his behalf than those pests in Courts who will try to corrupt and to pervert him in time. He is very young; he does not know the tricks and refinements which the courtiers will use to influence him as they wish in order to satisfy their interests, their hatred and their ambition. From his childhood he has been in the school of fanaticism and imbecility; this should make us fear that he lacks the resolution to examine for himself what he has been taught to adore stupidly.

You have preached tolerance; after Bayle, you are undoubtedly one of the wise men who have done humanity the most good. But if you have enlightened the whole world, those whose interest attaches them to superstition have rejected your light, and they still dominate the nations.

For my part, as a faithful disciple of the patriarch of Ferney, I am at present in negociation with a thousand Mahommedan families, for whom I am procuring establishments and mosques in Western Prussia.

Old Pollnitz died as he lived—still cheating, the night before he died. Nobody regrets him but his creditors.

All you say about our German bishops is only too true. They are " pigs fattened by the tenths of Zion." But you also know that in the Holy Roman Empire ancient custom, the Golden Bull, and the like ancient stupidities, make established abuses respectable. People see them, shrug their shoulders, and things

go on as they were. If fanaticism is to be diminished, it cannot be done by attacking the bishops first of all; but if the monks can be diminished, especially the begging orders, the people will become indifferent; when they are less superstitious they will allow the powers to restrain the bishops as it may suit the interest of the state. This is the only method to pursue. To undermine secretly and noiselessly the edifice of unreason will oblige it to collapse of itself. The Pope, in his present situation, is obliged to issue such briefs and bulls as his dear sons ask of him. His power, founded on the ideal credit of faith, loses in proportion as faith diminishes. If the Holy Father finds at the head of the nations a few ministers above vulgar prejudices, he will go bankrupt. His letters of credit and notes payable to bearer are half discredited already. No doubt posterity will enjoy the advantage of being able to think freely.

CCXI

From Voltaire

Ferney, 31st August, 1775

Sire,

I am sending back to-day to your Majesty your brave and prudent officer, d'Étallonde Morival, whom you have been graciously pleased to confide to me for eighteen months. I will be answerable that at Potsdam he will not be found to possess the heedless

and pretentious air of our self-styled French *marquis*. His conduct, his continual application to the study of tactics, and the art of engineering, his prudence in acts and words, the gentleness of his manners, his healthy mind, are strong proofs against the execrable and absurd madness of the sentence passed by three village judges who ten years ago condemned him with the chevalier de la Barre to a torture which Busiris would not have dared to imagine.

It is to be hoped that these dreadful atrocities will no longer be seen in France where they have hitherto formed so strange and so frequent a contrast with our levity. The world will cease to say: The gayest nation is the most barbarous. We have a wise ministry chosen by a young king no less wise, who means well. This your Majesty mentioned in your last letter of the 13th. Most of our errors and misfortunes came to us hitherto from our subservience to ancient customs honoured by the name of laws, in spite of our love of novelty. For instance, our criminal jurisprudence is almost entirely founded on what is called canon law, and on old procedure inherited from the inquisition. Our laws are a mixture of ancient barbarity ill modified by new regulations. Up till now our government has been like the town of Paris, a collection of palaces and hovels, of magnificence and misery, of admirable beauties and disgusting defects. Only a new town can be regular.

CCXII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 29th September, 1775

If horrible scandals are less common elsewhere than in France, we must attribute this to the vivacity of your nation which always rushes to extremes. It is not in France alone that we find a mixture of objects, some of which excite admiration and others condemnation; I think it is the same everywhere; since man himself is imperfect, how should he produce perfect works?

Your kingdom has been conquered by the Romans, the Salians, the Franks, the English and by superstition; all these conquerors have promulgated laws and this makes a chaos of your jurisprudence. To carry out a proper reform, it would be necessary to destroy and to build up again. Those who undertake this will have against them custom, prejudices and all of the nation attached to all the customs without understanding them, and who think that to touch them and to overthrow the kingdom is the same thing.

I believe you approve of the government of Pennsylvania as it is now established; it has only existed for a century; add five or six more to its existence and you will not recognise it, to such an extent is instability one of the permanent laws of this universe. Let the philosophers found the wisest government—it will have the same fate. And have these very

philosophers always been free from error? Have they not also spread it? Witness the substantial forms of Aristotle, Plato's balderdash, the vortex of Descartes, the monads of Leibnitz. What could I not say of the paradoxes with which Jean Jacques has regaled Europe! If we can count among the philosophers a man who has turned the heads of a few good family men to the extent that they educate their children like Emile.

From all these examples it follows that in spite of good intentions and the trouble they take, men will never reach perfection in any *genre*.

CCXIII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 5th December, 1775

I owe you a thousand obligations for the seeds you have been good enough to send me. Who would have said that our correspondence would run upon the art of Triptolemus, and that there would be emulation between us as to which cultivated his field better? Yet this is the first of arts, without which there would be neither merchants nor kings nor courtiers nor poets nor philosophers. The only real wealth is that produced by the earth. To improve estates, to clear uncultivated lands, to drain marshes, is making conquests over barbarity and creating livelihoods for colonists, who, finding themselves in a

position to marry, labour gaily to perpetuate the species and increase the number of industrious citizens.

We have imitated here the artificial meadows of the English; this has succeeded very well and has increased our herds by one-third. Their plough and their corn-drill have not been so successful; the plough because some of our land is too light; the corn-drill because it is too dear for the people and the peasants.

On the other hand we have succeeded in cultivating rhubarb in our gardens; it retains all its properties and in use does not differ from that brought from the East.

This year we have increased our silk to the extent of ten thousand pounds and our beehives by one-third.

These are the toys of my old age and the pleasures which may still be enjoyed by a mind whose imagination is extinguished. It is not given to everyone to be immortal like you. Our good patriarch is always the same. For my part, I have already sent part of my memory, the little imagination I had and my legs to the banks of Cocytus. The heavy baggage goes on ahead, and the main body is to follow.

CCXIV

From Voltaire

29th January, 1776

Sire,

The ancient religion of the Brahmins is evidently the origin of Christianity; you will be convinced of this if you will deign to read the letter on

India, which may amuse your philosophic mind; all I say of the Brahmins is taken word for word from authentic writings which M. Pauw knows better than I. I absolutely agree with him about those who think they know China better than Father Parennin, a very learned and very sensible man who lived for thirty years in Pekin.

It is true, Sire, that I have more respect for your seventy-six thousand acres of meadows and the seven thousand cows who owe their existence to you, than for the theological novels of the Chinese and of the Indians; but the emperor Kien-Long also clears lands and it is even asserted that his plough is more valuable than his lyre. You are certainly the only king on this globe superior in every respect.

I thank you for the Ammianus Marcellinus, the notes to which I am told are very instructive. This Ammianus was a superstitious person who believed in demons of the air and in sorcerers, as every one believed in his time, as the Welche believed even in the time of Louis XIV, as the Poles believe now more than ever; for I am told they have just burned seven poor old women accused of having spoiled the harvest by magical words.

CCXV

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 19th March, 1776

It is true, as you say, that the Christians grossly plagiarised the fables invented before them. I can forgive them the virgins on account of several beautiful pictures the painters have made of them; but you will admit that neither antiquity nor any other nation has imagined a more atrocious and blasphemous absurdity than that of eating God. It is a most revolting dogma, insulting to the Supreme Being, the height of madness and folly. It is true, the Gentiles made their gods play somewhat ridiculous parts by attributing to them human passions and weaknesses. The Indians attribute thirty incarnations to their Sommona-Codom; but these races do not eat the objects of their adoration. Only the Egyptians would have been allowed to devour their god Apis. This is how the Christians treat the autocrat of the universe.

I abandon the Chinese, the Indians and the Tartars to you and the Abbé Pauw. The European nations preoccupy me so much that in my meditations I never leave this, the most interesting portion of our globe. This does not prevent me from having read with pleasure the dissertations you were good enough to send me. How could one receive otherwise what comes from your pen! The Abbé Pauw claims to know that the Emperor Kien-Long is dead, that his

son is now ruling, and that the late Emperor exercised great cruelties upon the Jesuits. Perhaps he expects me to take up arms against Kien-Long, especially since he knows I am giving my protection to the remnants of Saint Ignatius's flock. But I remain neutral, more interested to learn whether Penn's colony will continue to practise pacific virtue, or whether, Quakers as they are, they will defend their liberty and fight for their homes. If that happens, as is probable, you will be obliged to admit that there are cases when war becomes necessary, since the most humane of all people will be fighting.

CCXVI

From Voltaire

8th November, 1776

If I do not weep in my cottage, seeing I am too dry, at least I have something to weep for; the gentlemen of Nazareth do not jest like those on the shores of the Baltic, they persecute people secretly and cruelly; they unearth a poor man in his lair and punish him for having laughed at their expense. All the misfortunes which can crush a poor man have fallen on me at once, law-suits, losses of property, ills of the body, ills of what is called the soul. I am absolutely " the man in his cottage "; but by Heaven, Sire, you are not " the man who weeps on his throne "; many years ago you had some experience of adversity,

but with what courage and grandeur of soul did you drink the cup! How much these ordeals contributed to your glory! How much at all times you have been in yourself superior to other men! I dare not lift my eyes to you from the depths of my decrepitude and misery. I do not know where I shall go to die. The reigning Duke of Wurtemburg, uncle to the princess you have just married so well, owes me some money which would have procured me an honourable burial; he does not pay me; which will be a great embarrassment to me when I am dead. If I dared, I would ask you to use your influence with him, but I dare not; I should much prefer to have your Majesty as surety.

Seriously, I do not know where I shall go to die. I am a little Job shrivelled up on my Swiss dunghill; and the difference between Job and me is that Job got well and ended up by being happy. The same thing happened to Tobias, lost like me in a Swiss canton in the country of the Medes; and the amusing part of that affair is that the holy scripture says his grandchildren buried him with rejoicing; apparently they found a good inheritance.

Forgive me, Sire, if now that I am nearly as blind as Tobias, and as miserable as Job, my mind is not sufficiently free to dare to write you a useless letter.

I throw myself at your Majesty's feet. *De profundis.*

CCXVII

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

25th November, 1776

I was distressed by your letter, and cannot guess the causes of your grief. The Gazettes say nothing; the letters from Geneva and Switzerland do not mention you; so that I guess roughly that the Infamous, more infamous than ever, is persecuting your old age. But in your neighbourhood you have Geneva, Lausanne, Neufchatel, which are so many ports of refuge in the storm.

I cannot guess what the lost law-suits may be. Most of your money is employed at Cadiz; it is certain that the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Annecy does not extend that far.

Have you been troubled on account of the changes you have introduced in Gex? Have the valets of Plutus leagued themselves with the charlatans of the Mass to create difficulties for you; I do not know; but this is all I can conjecture.

Meanwhile, I have written to Wurtemburg to help you in the matter of the debt which is known to me. However, I must tell you that I am not any too well received by his Serene Highness. But we will do what we can. It is singular that my destiny should have made me the consoler of the philosophers. I have given all the lenitives in my shop to soothe d'Alembert's grief. I would gladly do the same for

you, if I knew what was wrong. But I have learnt from Hippocrites that we must not try to cure an illness before we have thoroughly examined and studied it. My pharmacy is at your service; but it would be better if you did not need it. Meanwhile, I send you my sincere wishes for your satisfaction and long preservation.

Good God, what cruelty to persecute the old age of a man who renders his country illustrious and is the greatest ornament of our age! What barbarians!

CCXVIII

From Voltaire

Ferney, 9th December, 1776

Sire,

It is not surprising that a man who has spent his life in scribbling against those who deceive, rob and persecute mankind, should be a little tormented by these people at the end of his days. It is still less surprising that the Marcus Aurelius of our age should pity this old Epictetus. Your Majesty consoles me with a stroke of the pen for the outcries of the superstitious and implacable rabble.

I took the liberty to lay at your feet the reasons which have for a long time deprived me of the honour of writing to you; and among these reasons the first was the necessity to which I was reduced of being a little Libanius to reply to the Gregorys of Nazianzus and Cyrils.

The ant-hill I am building in my solitude which is being gnawed by the rats of French finance, was the second cause of my distress and silence; and the forgetfulness of your old pupil, the Duke of Wurtemburg, was the third.

In the chaos of little affairs which upset little heads, I did not dare at my age to write to your Majesty; I trembled for fear of doting before the master of Europe.

The same hand which gives instructions to Kings and consoles d'Alembert, is graciously stretched out to me. Your Majesty is indeed good to have written a word on my behalf to Wurtemburg; unfortunately my debt is in the countship of Montbeliard, and this principality of Montbeliard is in the jurisdiction of the Parlement of Besançon; such affairs are endless, and I am very near my end. The Duke of Wurtemburg has given me his word to-day that he will satisfy me some time next year; his Regency owes me a hundred thousand francs; it is the ruin of a man who is already ruining himself by building a small town. But I must be patient and await the Duke of Wurtemburg's payment, or death which pays for all.

I lay my miseries at your Majesty's feet, since you are graciously pleased to order me to do so. Posterity will laugh if it ever knows that a poor Parisian confided his troubles to Frederick the Great and that Frederick the Great deigned to listen to them.

CCXIX

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

Potsdam, 10th February, 1777

Your age should render your person sacred and inviolable. I am indignant, I am angry with the wretches who are poisoning the end of your life. I have often said to myself: "How can it be that Voltaire, the glory of France in his age, was born in a country so ungrateful as to allow him to be persecuted? What a discouragement for the future race! Henceforth where will be the Frenchman who will devote his talents to the glory of a nation which slights the great men it produces and punishes instead of rewarding them?"

Persecuted merit arouses my sympathy and I fly to its assistance though it be at the ends of the earth. If I must give up hopes of seeing the immortal Voltaire again, at least I shall be able to converse this summer with the wise Anaxagoras.[1] We shall philosophise together; your name will be mingled in our conversations and we shall lament the sad destiny of men who, from weakness or stupidity, are falling back into fanaticism.

Two Dominicans, who have the King of Spain at their feet, dispose of the whole kingdom; their sanguinary false zeal has re-established in all its splendour

[1] D'Alembert.

that Inquisition which M. d'Aranda had so wisely abolished. As the world now goes, the superſtitious triumph over the philosophers because the great masses of men have minds which are neither cultivated nor geometric. The mob knows that we appease those we have offended with presents; it thinks the same thing applies to the Divinity and that an infallible way of pleasing God is to give him the smoke which rises from a fire which burns a heretic. Add to this the ceremonies, the declamations of monks, the applause of friends, and the ſtupid piety of the multitude, and you will see it is not surprising that the purblind Spaniards should ſtill be attached to a cult worthy of cannibals.

Philosophers could prosper among the Greeks and Romans, because the religion of the Gentiles had no dogma; but the dogma of our Infamous ruins everything. Authors are obliged to write with a circumspection irksome to truth. The prieſtly rabble avenge the leaſt scratch endured by orthodoxy; no one dares to show the truth openly; and the tyrants of souls wish the ideas of citizens to be all caſt in the same mould.

Nevertheless you will always possess the advantage of having surpassed all your predecessors in the noble heroism with which you have combated error. And juſt as the famous Boerhaave is not reproached because he did not deſtroy fever, consumption, or epilepsy, but limited himself to curing in his own time some of his contemporaries; so we cannot reproach the learned doctor of souls at Ferney because he could not deſtroy

superstition and fanaticism, and because he only applied his remedies to those who were curable.

CCXX

From Voltaire

25th November, 1777

I hear, Sire, that M. d'Alembert has proposed one of the martyrs of philosophy as one of your librarians. It is Delisle, of whom your Majesty has heard, a man who was nearly condemned like Morival by a sanhedrim of imbecile barbarians. This Delisle is quite learned for a wit; he is very industrious; he possesses as much true virtue as the bigots affect false virtue. I think him worthy to serve your Majesty in all branches of literature. Your vocation is to repair our stupidities and injustices.

I am eighty-four to-day. I have more aversion than ever from extreme unction and those who give it.

CCXXI

From Frederick II, King of Prussia

25th January, 1778

I have received the pamphlet of a wise man, of a philosopher, of a zealous citizen who modestly points

out to the government the defects of the laws in his country and demonstrates the necessity for reforming them. This work deserves everyone's approval. In natural equity and right reason there is only one sentiment, which is that of truth, as you have luminously demonstrated. Why is it not followed? Because labour is more feared than the public good is loved, because of the antiquity of abuses, and still more perhaps so as not to add a jewel to the crown which an old philosopher has made for himself, by using the great number of talents lavished upon him by nature. This work shall enter my library as a monument of your love of humanity. Copernicus, may it not displease you, shall also have his little corner since he is a Prussian; he may find a place between Archimedes and Newton. As to your Newton, I confess I do not understand his void and his gravity; I admit he has demonstrated the movement of the heavenly bodies with more exactitude than his forerunners; but you will admit that it is an absurdity to maintain the existence of Nothing. Let us not pass the limits given us by the little knowledge of matter we have. In my opinion, the doctrine of the void, and of minds which exist without organs, are the height of the disorder of the human mind. If a poor ignoramus of my class took it upon himself to say: "Between this globe and Saturn that which does not exist exists," they would laugh in my face; but Master Isaac, who says the same thing, has made the whole thing bristle with a mass of calculations which few geometers have followed; they prefer to believe him

on his word and to admit his ironies, rather than to lose themselves with him in the labyrinth of the integral calculus and the infinitesimal calculus. The English built ships on the most advantageous shape as indicated by Newton, and their admirals have assured me that these ships did not sail nearly so well as those built according to the rules of experience. I wanted to make a fountain in my garden. Euler calculated the force of the wheels necessary to raise the water in a reservoir, from which it was to flow back through canals and spring up at Sans Souci. My mill was carried out geometrically and could not raise a drop of water fifty yards from the reservoir. Vanity of vanities! Vanity of geometry!

CCXXII

From Voltaire

Paris, 1st April, 1778

Sire,

The French gentleman who will hand this letter to your Majesty and who is considered to be worthy of appearing before you, will be able to tell you that if I have not had the honour of writing to you for a long time the reason is that I have been occupied in avoiding two things which pursued me in Paris—hisses and death.

It is amusing that at eighty-four I have escaped two fatal illnesses. That is the result of being devoted to you; I made use of your name and I was saved.

At the representation of a new tragedy, I saw with surprise and the greateſt satisfaction that the public, which thirty years ago looked upon Conſtantine and Theodosius as the models of princes and even of saints, applauded with unheard-of transports verses which say that Conſtantine and Theodosius were only superſtitious tyrants. I have seen twenty similar proofs of the progress which philosophy has at laſt made in all ranks. I do not despair of hearing delivered a panegyric of the Emperor Julian in a month's time; and certainly if the Parisians remember that he dispensed juſtice among them like Cato, and fought for them like Cæsar, they owe him eternal gratitude.

It is true, then, Sire, that in the end men become enlightened and that those who think themselves paid to blind them are not always able to thruſt out their eyes! Thanks be to your Majeſty! You have conquered prejudices like your other enemies. You enjoy all our inſtitutions of every sort. You are the conqueror of superſtition, as well as the support of German liberty.

Live longer than I to ſtrengthen all the empires you have founded. May Frederick the Great be Frederick the Immortal! Be graciously pleased to accept the profound reſpect and inviolable attachment of

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